

Hakushaku to Yousei

vol.19

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When was it that that happened?

When Edgar's mother held his hand. The sun was extremely bright, and his and his mother's shadows were clearly visible on the grass.

His mother held his hand so firmly it almost hurt as she pulled him along. Edgar glanced briefly behind him as though checking on some scary monster behind them as he trotted after his mother. A woman with black hair stood by the lake. A woman holding a black parasol. She didn't come after them. And yet his mother quickened her pace as though to flee. The woman spoke the words of a curse upon Edgar. And his mother, looking frightened, hurried along as though to escape that curse.

Moments earlier, the woman had approached Edgar who'd been playing on his own.

"You're Sylvanford's son. You should never have been born."

She grasped Edgar's shoulders firmly and glared at him from beneath the black parasol with her black almond-shaped eyes. "One day, you'll kill your parents. And you'll bring about the destruction of your house," she murmured as though to curse him.

She suddenly wrapped her hands around his neck. Her hands were cold. While it didn't seem like she was squeezing, he could sense her strong desire to kill him.

Most likely, he didn't feel afraid because she looked at him with pity.

"It would've been better if I could've killed you. For your sake, too....."

Before he knew it, his mother was there and grabbed him away from the woman before returning the way she'd come.

"It's too late, isn't it, Jeanne-Marie?"

His mother's name was Jean-Mary. Edgar frantically tried to keep up with his mother even as he was curious about the woman who used the French pronunciation of his mother's name.

Mother, what's wrong?

Leaving the forest, they could no longer see the woman.

Why am I going to kill you?

His mother stopped in surprise and looked at Edgar as though he frightened her. But that lasted only for an instant, and regaining her usual gentle expression, she hugged her young son.

Everything is fine. You're my treasure. Nothing bad will happen.

But his mother started crying.

I'm sorry, she said hugging Edgar.

He didn't understand. But caught up by her tears, the young Edgar cried, too.

Just who was that woman.

When was it and to what extent did his mother realise her son's destiny?

And the woman's curse eventually became reality.

Even though Edgar himself didn't kill his parents, his existence did.

"You should never have been born....."

Ahh, perhaps she was right.

No, that's not true.

It was pointless having these sorts of dreams now. Why did old memories that he'd forgotten come back in dreams to haunt him?

He's finally found happiness.

Edgar fought his way free from his dream and opened his eyes. He took a deep breath as he tried to calm himself. The curtains covering the tall windows glowed whitely from the morning sun. He unconsciously made sure he was in his bedroom in the Ashenbert residence.

He was used to waking up having been disturbed by nightmares of the past.

And regardless of how much he might have cried in his dreams, he showed no sign of tears in the waking world. Even though Edgar was supposed to have overcome all his obstacles, he couldn't help feeling afraid at the words the woman had said in the past.

He should never have been born.

Could it be that that was still true about him. If so, did it mean he'd end up losing what was most dear to him again? He quickly checked beside him and saw Lydia sleeping peacefully beside him. Relieved, he curled up next to her careful not to wake her. He felt her warmth seep into his parched heart.

More than anything else, she was his most precious treasure.

He brushed her hair aside so he could see her face better. Lydia smiled slightly as though it tickled a little. She cuddled her head to his chest as though seeking warmth.

Since marrying, he could feel her love for him even more. And while it made him very happy, he couldn't help wishing for more.

For example, if he were to hold her so strongly right now that he woke her and then want her out of his growing desire. He wasn't sure if Lydia would forgive him. But he didn't want to upset her by doing something like that. He felt that disturbing her when she's sleeping so peacefully and happily to satisfy himself wasn't the same thing.

What was the point of showing her that he was so weak as to be disturbed by dreams?

He was no longer alone. So he should be able to become even stronger.

He slowly held her careful not to hold her too tightly, and Lydia's scent filled his heart enough to erase the unknown woman's cursed words.

Edgar had no choice but to change for Lydia's sake. And to throw away the past and the prince's bonds.

Chapter 1: Honeymoon in Armorica (the land of the sea)

Two weeks after their wedding, Lydia and Edgar were in Paris together. They thoroughly enjoyed themselves going to Versailles Palace, Notre Dame Cathedral, and the Opera House. They also took great pleasure in the fashion there which was much fancier and more elegant than London.

Naturally, they enjoyed shopping as well.

Although when they entered the expensive boutiques, Lydia could only stare at the prices, and it didn't matter how much Edgar suggested items, she ended up only browsing. Even so, she really liked the hat that she finally decided to buy.

Edgar pushed her saying that compared to having a bonnet covering her head, pinning this hat with its sweet artificial flowers to her hair when it's put up looks much cleaner and more elegant. And Lydia couldn't help feeling more and more the same way.

It might still be a bit too showy for London society. But it was always an adventure for ladies to try the latest of fashions and even though the older ladies might frown, she couldn't help taking pleasure in it.

But more than anything else, for Lydia, her very marriage was an adventure like jumping into an unknown world. Because her partner, Edgar, was from the nobility. Naturally, her honeymoon and trip abroad were new, but even everyday life was completely different to how she lived before marrying.

"The lady staying in this room is a countess, yet she didn't buy a single bag at that famous shop."

Lydia was in the dressing room taking care of her things when she heard a maid's voice come from her room. Apparently, they'd come to replenish the oil in the lamps.

"My cousin works in that shop. Apparently she said that the items were all expensive."

"Even though she's staying in this sort of expensive room."

"Maybe she's putting on airs?"

The maids laughed as they left the room.

While she wasn't very good at French, since she was marrying into the earl's household, Lydia had studied hard and could now understand some of the language. Lydia sighed feeling a bit resentful of that ability.

This famous high-class hotel in central Paris was well-known even among commoners. Since Edgar had taken care of all their travel arrangements, Lydia hadn't thought about their travel expenses, but most likely, that hotel had been chosen because it was appropriate for the earl's household and had nothing to do with putting on appearances.

After Paris, they were planning on visiting Bretagne. She'd heard that they

would be staying at one of France's distinguished upper-class resorts there.

No doubt, Lydia's sense of money was too much that of a commoner's. But Lydia never thought that a single purchase could affect the reputation of the earl's household was completely unexpected.

'Ah, I'll have to watch what I say in front of others,' she reproached herself as she put her gloves and handkerchief in her handbag.

Lydia suddenly noticed the corner of a paper showing from underneath the tablecloth and reached for it. It seemed to be a bromide paper and was the photo of a woman with heavy makeup. Picking it up and seeing it more clearly, Lydia blushed and froze at what she saw.

"Wh-what is this?!"

The woman looked at the camera invitingly as she lay on a sofa deliberately raising the hem of her skirt. With her shins showing, it was clear that it was an illicit pornographic photo.

"Lydia, are you ready to leave?"

Lydia's head spun in anger by the time Edgar entered the room, and struggling to keep calm, she confronted him.

"Edgar! Th-this was on the floor here!"

Lydia avoided looking at the utterly shameless image of the woman showing

her legs and thrust the photo at Edgar. Edgar took the photo, and showing no sign of discomfort, he smiled eloquently.

"Ah, your legs are much more attractive."

"Wh-what a thing to say!"

"The French seem to like this sort of thing. They're being sold all over the place here in Paris, and in London, these sorts of photos all seem to be from France."

"That's not the point! What are you doing buying this sort of thing?!"

"Eh? It's not mine."

Edgar cocked his head to one side in surprise, but Lydia refused to be fooled. Regardless how sweet and good a young gentleman he may seem, deep down, he was a womaniser. Even though he was her husband, she wouldn't be surprised if he had a collection of such things.

"Who else's could it be but yours?"

But Edgar just shrugged in denial. "Maybe it's Raven's. Let's pretend we didn't see it."

"Wha-, are you trying to have Raven take the blame for this sin?"

"Sin... Any man would be interested in this sort of thing, and Raven is a proper man."

Even though Edgar's attendant Raven looked like he was about 15, he should be turning 19. And while it may be true he was a man, she couldn't see him liking these sorts of photos.

"My lord, I've arranged for a carriage."

Edgar confronted Raven upon his arrival. "Is this yours?"

Weren't we going to pretend we didn't see it?

Raven started to deny it was his when he realised what the photo was of. He hesitated when he saw the look on Lydia's face.

".....Yes, it's mine." Thanks to the unusual circumstances surrounded Raven's birth, he showed little emotion and couldn't lie. But at the same time, he was so loyal that he thought it only natural to give his life for Edgar. Because of that, if it was for Edgar's sake, he would try his best to lie. However, he was still unable to lie convincingly.

"See! It's not Raven's after all!"

"It's not mine. That's it. Maybe it's Nico's."

As if that were possible!

For some reason, Lydia's partner Nico was accompanying them on their honeymoon. Even so, he was a fae cat. More than photos of women's legs, he would pounce on fried fish and scotch.

Lydia sighed deeply. "I won't get angry, so tell me the truth."

"But you're already angry."

"That's because you're trying to evade the issue."

"I really don't know anything about it."

"Umm..... that's mine....."

At that moment, a small young lady, with her flaxen hair in braids, hesitantly stepped forward before the arguing couple.

"Eh, Kelly.....?"

Kelly was Lydia's lady's maid. After the wedding, she'd been called for from the Hebrides, and almost as soon as she arrived in London, she accompanied them on this trip.

"Umm... some young men selling things on the street refused to leave me alone, so I ended up giving him a copper coin, and it turned out that's what he was selling."

Perhaps it couldn't be helped since Kelly didn't understand the language.

"I figured I'd throw it away, but it disappeared from my pocket at some point," Kelly explained looking even redder than Lydia.

Kelly was born and raised on an island which had strong tie with the fae. She didn't doubt that the fae existed and she respected the special ability fairy doctors possessed. She understood Lydia and was serious about her work, and she was trying her best to serve with her inherent enthusiasm.

"My..... I see."

Kelly had taken care of Lydia previously, so Lydia, too, felt very close to her. So much so, that part of what she was looking forward to with this trip was having fun with Kelly.

"I'm sorry, it's my fault that the two of you ended up arguing."

"Don't worry about it, Kelly."

"That's right. Since I've been proven innocent, there's no problem. You see, Lydia? I have the cutest wife in the world, so I'm not interested in pictures of women."

He smiled as he gazed at Lydia from up close. Even though they were married, these sorts of come-ons were still common in his regular conversation with her.

".....I'm sorry, Edgar."

Lydia looked down contrite for having been convinced of Edgar's guilt.

Edgar gazed at her still more. "If you tell me you love me, I think I can forget all about it."

Lydia blushed flustered unable to could think of what to say. Raven and Kelly quickly turned away from her, but she only became even more embarrassed.

"In that case, you can tell me tonight when we're alone," Edgar said cheerfully as he wrapped his arm around Lydia drawing her close. She was completely flustered.

"Well, we should get going, or we'll miss our train."

Just like the word 'honeymoon' suggested, this trip was going completely at Edgar's pace. He didn't restrain himself in the least from touching Lydia even though others were present. Even though he said that it was okay to kiss on the street corner since they were in France, many of the people at the hotel and at the tourist attractions were English.

Leaving the room, Lydia casually slipped free from Edgar's arm. She had no idea that he enjoyed seeing her kindness as she hesitated to reject such displays of affection despite being so virtuous.

In any case, the Earl and Countess Ashenbert, have only just begun to carry the name of the legendary Blue Knight Earl together.

Bretagne is in the northwest part of France. The peninsula was surrounded on three sides by the sea, and it's always had strong ties with England which was on the other side of the straight. Its name meant Little Britain. Long ago, people who'd been living on the British island, sic England, were forced to flee across the straight when the Angles invaded. And they named the place they settled after their homeland.

Lydia and Edgar chose that location for their honeymoon for a reason. While visiting a painting exhibit being put on by a French art seller, they found a very surprising painting. It was the portrait of a noblewoman wearing a ring. Apparently, it was of a red moonstone, and it was identical to the white moonstone wedding ring Lydia wore. The size of the stone, its cut, and the design of the ring's setting were all identical. In which case, it was possible that the red moonstone in the painting had some sort of tie to the earl's house.

Lydia's wedding ring was said to be the first Earl of Ibrazel's--the Lord Blue Knight's--wife's ring. One of the fae, Gwendolyn's (meaning white bow) ring held her magic and protected the earl's house. It was also said that the Lord Blue Knight had a child named Frandolyn (red bow). So, it was possible that, like Gwendolyn's white moonstone, there might be a red moonstone ring as well.

While the painting in question wasn't old, it wasn't known who the artist was. The woman in the painting was wearing a mask, and there was a window behind her. Through the open window, an island could be seen in the emerald seascape in the background. The cliffs surrounding the island were a pinkish-orange similar to the red moonstone. A castle made from similar pink stone stood there, and green trees could be seen dotting the land.

The art dealer said it was Bretagne's landscape. While he wasn't at all

knowledgeable of Bretagne, the art was all taken from the residence of a deceased Breton, so most likely that was the case.

Edgar tried to purchase the painting. The art dealer readily agreed, but the next day, he apologised saying that he could no longer sell it. Apparently, a person tied to the original owner had come forward saying that that painting was never supposed to be sold. He tried to find out who the original owner was, but there were so many middle men that it was impossible to determine.

Lydia thought that they might be able to find something out if they went to Bretagne, and if they were lucky, they might be able to learn something about the Blue Knight Earl's house. Edgar agreed with her, and that's how they decided where to spend their honeymoon. Truth to be told, there was much they didn't know about the earl's household. While Edgar had managed to gain the name of the Blue Knight Earl whose family had no more heirs, he knew nothing about the real earl's family.

It's said that the first earl came from Ibrazel, the location of which is unknown but not in the human realm, and it was also unclear what sort of abilities the earl had. However, Lydia wondered if it might be possible to get to Ibrazel. And by doing so, if perhaps it would be possible for Edgar to gain some ability that would truly make him the successor to the Blue Knight Earl. And perhaps at the same time, he would be able to eliminate everything of the 'Prince of Calamity' that he'd ended up taking inside himself. Especially since the prince had feared and been wary of the Blue Knight Earl and did everything in his power to wipe out that bloodline.

"Ahh, we're finally out of Paris. Major cities are all so filthy," Nico muttered as he stared out the window from his seat on the train. There was no sign of the mass of stone buildings anymore, and fields spread throughout the peaceful scenery.

"If that's the case, you didn't have to come with us." Lydia leaned against the cushions as shown grimaced slightly suffering from a slight headache possibly caused by motion sickness.

Nico looked up at Lydia and shook his head pretentiously. "There are some things you can't do on your own, right? You're still not much of a fairy doctor without me—your partner—around." Even so, Nico was an callous partner and would quickly run away when things became dangerous. He didn't have any special useful magic, and about the only thing he was truly good at was guiding her places. Despite that, Lydia managed to get through a number of situations by working together with Nico.

"True, after all, it's said that the fae are supposed to be about as common in Bretagne as they are in Scotland and Wales."

Fairy doctors didn't have any magic ability of their own. Through understanding and have good relations with the fae, they are able to get the fae's help, that's all. And for Lydia, Nico was her must trusted fae friend. If there was any chance of finding any clues about Faerie during this trip, truth to be told, she felt much more confident having Nico there.

"Yeah, while the cuisine in France is supposed to be really good, they have neither fried fish nor any scotch. It was really disappointing not to have bacon, sausage, or fried eggs for breakfast."

"So, you really came just for the food?"

"And on top of that, now we're going to be travelling for who knows how many hours by train. I just can't relax when travelling on iron." Despite saying

that, he stretched on the seat. "I guess the only thing to do is to sleep the entire way there."

He lay down and crossing his legs and covered his face with his top hat.

"Um, shall I get Mr. Nico a blanket?" Kelly asked as she watched him.

"It's alright, Kelly. Nico has wonderful fur so he won't be cold."

"Ah..... you're right." Kelly was still trying to come to grips with the idea that Nico could talk, was one of the fae, and was a gentleman and not a cat. Every time she caught sight of Nico, she couldn't help staring at him curiously.

"Lydia, I got you some medicine." Edgar opened the door to the private compartment and smiled.

He was supposed to have gone to the deck to view the landscape, so Lydia couldn't help cocking her head to one side when he suddenly mentioned medicine.

"You have a headache, right?"

"Yes, but it's not so bad as to take anything for it. Perhaps it's because the air's much clearer now that we've left Paris, but I'm feeling a bit better now."

"Really? If so, that's good, but maybe you should take it just in case? We'll be travelling for quite a while by train, so you shouldn't push yourself," Edgar said. He stretched out a hand towards Lydia's cheek and looked at her as he pressed

his forehead against hers as though to see for himself. His bright blond hair pressed against Lydia's lashes.

"Hmm, you don't seem to have a fever."

She felt like she was about to have one instead.

"The best thing would be to rest. It's easy to wear yourself out while travelling." The door was still open. It was the person standing in the doorway that spoke.

"Um, Edgar, that person is...?"

Lydia wished Edgar would have said something sooner if he'd brought someone with him. She hurriedly pushed Edgar away.

However, Edgar turned and cocked his head curiously.

"Hey, Edgar. I spotted you on deck and thought I'd say hello. If your wife's not feeling well, perhaps I can be of some service. After all, I am a doctor."

".....Who are you?"

"You're kidding. You forgot? I'm Francis de Finistère. We met last year at Lord Postner's party."

Edgar looked to be thinking things over.

The gentleman spoke fluent English and wore a black patch over one eye. But even more striking than that, was his wavy, shoulder-length silvery hair. It would be difficult to forget after meeting him, but perhaps it was possible given how many people would be present at a social gathering like a party.

"Still, you're married? You have a lovely wife. When did she catch your attention? As I recall, back then, you were pursuing the Postner's daughter....."

"Aah, I remember, now, Francis! What a coincidence meeting in a place like this. How far will you be travelling? Are you travelling alone?" Edgar spoke up suddenly.

Lydia couldn't help wondering if he'd deliberately cut the man off.

"Would you mind if I had a seat, Edgar?"

"By all means." Edgar smiled as he sat down next to Lydia and gestured for Francis to sit opposite them.

Raven entered carrying a glass of water and some medicine and put them on the table. He exchanged a brief glance with Edgar, and nodding slightly as though understanding what he was to do next, he sat in the chair next to the door and watched Francis steadily.

"Won't you introduce your wife?"

"This is Lydia. Ah, kindly don't come any closer than that."

"Hahah, you're completely smitten with her, aren't you? I thought you were the typical playboy, so I'm a bit surprised."

"Deep down, I'm a devoted man."

"I didn't know that," Lydia murmured.

Francis laughed. He seemed very liberal and had class but wasn't pretentious. Lydia took a liking to him, and Edgar seemed to treat him warmly. Kelly laughed, too.

"Lydia, until I met you, I'd never known a lady whom I could be devoted to."

"You're such a smooth-talker."

"I see, Edgar. So, you're the reason your wife's tired. You're not getting enough sleep, right?"

"Eh? Is that true, Lydia?"

So you ask, but...

"See? She doesn't know what to say, so no doubt that's the case."

"I see. I'll have to think about that."

"Master, that's not an appropriate topic for a gentleman to discuss in front of a lady," Kelly warned.

Lydia felt relieved. Unlike Lydia who could only blush and become flustered, Kelly was much more mature mentally possibly because she'd been working since she was a child. Just because she was married didn't mean that she would suddenly become mature. And the fact that she was a countess now still hasn't completely sunk in yet.

'I have to keep myself together better,' she thought as she looked out the window. The train was travelling through fields of grapes. Francis said something and laughter filled the private compartment. Lydia opened the medicinal packet as she listened idly to the rhythmic sound of the train and the conversation happening around her. Raven was the only one who sat still as though to trying to hide presence.

"I'm travelling on my own wherever will my takes me. I wanted to visit some places from the past," Francis said suddenly serious.

Sensing the change in topic, Lydia turned her attention back to the conversation.

"Memories of a past love?"

".....That's right. But a bitter love. Although it's rather pathetic visiting the places where she and I spent time together."

"Can you no longer see her?" Lydia couldn't help asking having been caught by the topic of romance.

"I don't know where she is. She suddenly left me, and I haven't seen her since. Ahh, but I don't want to depress a newlywed. I thought it was about time for me to move on, and came up with the idea of travelling like this. I thought if I went to the places she'd been again that I might be able to get over her," Francis said speaking cheerfully.

"Was she from Bretagne?"

"She was originally from somewhere else, but she loved Bretagne. That's right, it was like she was in love with it.Apparently, it's similar to where she's from. She didn't know if she'd be able to return home, so perhaps her feelings included a mix of her longing for her homeland. The stones of Carnac, the Emerald Coast of Saint Malo... Even though they're part of France, they're different from the rest of the country and have the feeling of another land. The sound of the Breton language. And I ended up becoming attracted to the wonders of Bretagne that she spoke of."

'Unrequitted love is similar to homesickness for a distant land,' Lydia thought idly as the medication started to take effect.

"I wonder if the fairies really exist....." Francis murmured as though sighing.

"Did that lady talk about fairies?" Edgar asked.

"She said that she often saw them in Bretagne. Interesting, isn't it?"

".....They really do exist," Lydia murmured as sleep began to overcome her. She didn't resist as Edgar pulled her close and lay her head on his shoulder.

"Thank you, my lady. You're the first one to say that." Francis looked at Lydia solemnly.

At some point, Lydia started to be able to talk unhesitatingly about the fae. Most likely, ever since she started to feel she had Edgar's support. Having someone with her who didn't laugh at the idea of the fae was all it took to give her strength. It wasn't as though people who believed in the fae or people who wanted to believe in the fae no longer existed. In which case, perhaps her own words could also give someone strength. Lydia smiled as sleep slowly overcame her.

When she woke, she found that her head resting in Edgar's lap. Edgar smiled as he looked at Lydia as she quickly straightened up. "You slept well. How do you feel?"

Looking around, Francis was nowhere to be seen. Raven and Kelly, too, had left the compartment. Nico was still snoring away where he lay on the seat.

"I feel much better.But, um... when did I....."

"You mean when did you take over my lap? I thought it would be more comfortable that way."

"Y-you did that?!"

"You don't need to worry. My lap is yours alone."

"That's not what I meant. Doing that sort of thing in front of others..... it's shameful!"

"Others? Ah, you mean because Francis was there? It's okay, he's French after all."

"Do you think anything's okay in France?!"

"Yes. Not to mention we're newlyweds so most things will be forgiven."

What sort of logic is that?

Paying no heed to Lydia's astonishment, Edgar drew close and kissed her.

"He was impressed at how close a couple we are."

Perhaps you're mistaken and he was taken aback.

"I fell asleep and didn't give him my regards. Even though he's your friend..... Did he already get off?"

"He got off at the previous station. But perhaps we'll see him again since he'll be travelling around Bretagne."

'If that's the case, that's okay,' Lydia thought realising that she was hoping to see him again. She absolutely didn't feel that in any strange way, but rather she felt she wanted to talk with him more about the fae.

"Also, Lydia, there's no need to concern yourself about failing to maintain any

social responsibilities. He's not my friend."

"Eh? But you seemed to be on good terms."

Edgar put his hand to his chin as he thought things over.

"Any way I look at things, I don't think we've ever met. That sort of unusual foreigner hadn't been invited to the party at the Postners's. And yet he knew about me. I wonder what he's up to."

".....More to the point, what were you thinking?! After all, you were acting like you knew him!"

"I thought maybe I'd be able to figure out what he was up to."

Lydia stared at him in disbelief unable to comprehend Edgar's way of thinking.

"By the way, Edgar, didn't you try to hide something earlier? Something about chasing after a member of the Postner household....."

"Hm? What are you talking about?" Edgar quickly stood and reached out for Lydia's hat that was hanging on the wall. He smiled sweetly as he ended the conversation. "We'll be getting off at the next stop, so we should start getting ready."

They stopped by Mont Saint Michel on the Western tip of Normandy, and taking their time and enjoying their sight-seeing, Lydia and the others didn't reach the resort in Bretagne until three days later. That area, known as the Pink Granite Coast, was just like its name suggested. The pinkish cliffs were beautiful as they stretched along the coastline.

Lately, the number of manors owned by wealthy Americans had increased, and more English and European nobility had taken to gathering there.

Naturally they came to this coastal area because the island and castle shown in the image had a pinkish hue to them. When Lydia checked with her mineralogist father, he told her that that colour of granite was to be found in Bretagne. And since the buildings in the area were built from those stones, they all had that rosy tinge to them. He also told her that legends about red moonstone might exist in the area. Lydia's father liked to gather legends and tales about various stones and it was an area of study in natural history.

Unfortunately, he didn't know any details of the legends. Apparently, he hadn't managed to get that far in his research. However, he did tell her that moonstone was a type of feldspar, and feldspar was a component often found in granite.

It was as though the red moonstone ring was a result of having concentrated the reddish colour of the pink granite. The feeling that they should visit the pink granite coast became even stronger, hence why they came.

Lydia's attention was instantly caught by the unusual scenery. The coast that stretched as far as the eye could see was literally rose-coloured. Since they arrived at sunset, the sea, too, looked as though roses had been dissolved in it.

Islands could be seen dotting the sea. The islands were like rose-coloured precipices jutting out from the sea.

Around the harbour, seagulls were like dancing black shadows and the clouds glowed rosily. Just like its name Little Britain, Britain lay on the other side of the horizon. The British people who crossed the straight a long time ago must have risked their lives crossing what was then a vast distance, but now, it was a nearby resort with many English visitors. Even at the hotel where Lydia and the others arrived, the English accent particular to the upper crust could be heard throughout.

The hotel which stood at the top of a cliff was a beautifully renovated old castle and was orangey-pink hued. The interior was also very elegant and it was done in a manner liked by the nobility. The suite Lydia was shown had a master bedroom, drawing room, and two attached dressing rooms, and the first thing she did was to go out onto the balcony where she had a commanding view of the pink coast and the sea.

"Are you glad we came?" Edgar stood beside her and smiled.

"Yes, the view is wonderful." Lydia raised her hand bathing her moonstone ring in the rays from the setting sun. "Bow, do you know? If the red moonstone is nearby?"

However the moonstone didn't answer. For one thing, it didn't speak the language of people.

"Where we should start searching? I wonder if we walked along the coast if we'd find the island and castle that was in that painting," Lydia said.

Edgar shrugged. "The pink granite coast continues for 30 miles."

"Eh? Really? That's no good. If only we had the painting, we could've shown it to people....."

They didn't know who the artist was nor who owned the painting. They didn't even know if the island actually existed.

"We only just arrived, yet you're quite eager to get started."

"But it's something very important to us."

"Us, huh. That's nice. It means we're of one mind and body, right?"

"Well..... yeah." After all, they were married.

Edgar looked amused as Lydia blushed. He hugged her from behind wrapping his arms around her below her bust. Lydia couldn't help feeling flustered when she felt him press his lips to the back of her neck.

".....Wait, Edgar, you should think about this, too. There might be a clue about Ibrazel here."

Lydia tried to move his arms, but it was no use.

"While it would be nice if there is a clue, it doesn't really matter if there isn't. Our primary goal is to have fun travelling and further deepen our love, right?"

"Eh? Really?"

At that unexpected response, Edgar loosened his embrace and turning Lydia towards him, he raised an eyebrow slightly. "It's our honeymoon, after all."

"Ah..... um, well, yes."

He blinked in disbelief. "Lydia, you didn't come here to do your work as a fairy doctor, did you?" As a member of the earl's household, it was an important job. "What can I do to make you only able to think of me?"

Lydia panicked at the wicked look on his face and put some distance between them. "I-I should get ready for dinner," she said as she retreated to the centre of the room and quickly called Kelly.

Edgar seemed to give in when her lady's maid appeared. "Well, I guess that's okay. After all, we still have lots of time left to our honeymoon."

Lydia sighed in relief. She wasn't used to the aggressiveness he occasionally showed glimpses of. While she didn't mind his gentle come-ons or his teasing that would make her blush, she couldn't help feeling shaken when she felt he pursued her more strongly than that. Most likely, he wasn't being satisfied the way she was right now. She felt that he was holding a part of himself back. Because she had no sex appeal and was so childlike? But what exactly is sex appeal? She wasn't really sure. It could be that she didn't have what he wanted. She couldn't help feeling that she didn't want him to realise that.

When he disappeared into the next room, she then worried about her

brusque attitude. "The honeymoon's a lot more difficult than I expected," she murmured unconsciously. Kelly, who'd brought Lydia's dress for her, smiled.

"But, Mrs. Lydia, you're enjoying yourself, aren't you?"

"Yes.....I'm enjoying the trip. But getting away from our regular routine, it seems like we'll become aware of things we didn't know about one another."

"That's what the honeymoon's for—to strengthen your relationship."

"What if you end up realising things you don't like?"

"Did you find something?"

"I-it's not like that."

Edgar was like that before they got married. Including that aggressiveness. Before, though, Lydia could reject that and could even pretend she didn't know about it. But she couldn't do that anymore. Since they were married, she thought it was wrong to run away. But she couldn't help pulling back.

"I..... wonder if I'm different... from Edgar's expectations."

Having finished getting ready for dinner, Lydia could only stare at the splendour of the dining room when she entered; it was like one would expect at a palace. While the place was already magnificently built, it seems that they took things a step further for dinner. The people gathered there all seemed so gorgeous and caught the eye. The ladies were all dressed even more

extravagantly than could be seen in London society and they wore large gems as though to show them off. The lustrous peppermint green dress Lydia was wearing was so classy that it might have seemed plain by comparison.

In the midst of the large glinting diamonds and emeralds, Lydia wore what looked to be a delicate knitted lace choker with seed pearls and a hair ornament.

Kelly said that Edgar had suggested them, and they didn't glitter so much as to catch the eye, but Edgar was smiling in satisfaction.

"I guess this is to be expected of a resort where the wealthy gather."

Having taken their seats, Lydia felt nervous as she glanced around surreptitiously.

"True. But you're the one people are paying the most attention to."

Lydia didn't understand what he meant, but after they finished their dinner, their server left a card for them.

"We've been invited to the Viscount and Viscountess Newman's salon. Shall we go?" Edgar asked after opening it.

"Um, would it be better to go?"

"We'd only be giving our regards. Since we'll be staying here a while, and the crowd of English nobility has most likely already become established, it

wouldn't hurt to get to know them."

Apparently, even in a foreign hotel, a social group seems to exist among the long-term guests.

"Do you know the Newmans, Edgar?"

"No. Most likely they're newly established nobility. But it seems like they know my name, and it should be as formal as London society. Perhaps there'll be some young ladies you'll get along with."

Perhaps he meant that it would be a chance to make some friends. Lydia nodded as she hid her reluctance. Since she'd become the Countess Ashenbert, she didn't want to cause Edgar any embarrassment.

Getting her energy up, she was surprised to find that the salon they went to had a friendly atmosphere. There were a number of foreign as well as English nobility there. The jewels they wore as though competing against one another spoke of how wealthy they must all be.

Since Edgar was used to such things, he quickly got along with Lord and Lady Newman and became the centre of attention of the people there. Lady Newman was apparently quite a lot younger than her husband and age-wise, seemed more like an older sister to Lydia. Living in France, she mentioned that she hasn't been in London society lately, and wanted to hear about London and the Court. Lydia had only been invited to Court once, but that was more than enough to impress Lady Newman, and she treated Lydia kindly. The other ladies in the salon also viewed Lydia favourably. Complimenting her for her dress and accessories, they praised her so much that Lydia couldn't help feeling a bit flustered.

So when she excused herself from the salon briefly, she felt quite relieved.

"You're forcing yourself, aren't you?"

Lydia had been leaning against the banister looking down into the grand hall trying to clear her head from the alcohol when someone spoke to her. Turning, she saw a tall black-haired woman with strong features looking her way.

"Men always think it only natural for their wives to cope with stress for their sakes. Even if you look tired, they won't notice."

Lydia flinched at the sudden rude comment, but the lady's manner was so forthright that Lydia couldn't help feeling curious about her.

"Who..... are you?"

"Aeris."

She only gave her first name. She appeared to be in her late 20s, but her calm demeanor made her seem even older still. She was an unusual lady.

"I'm Lydia Ashe....."

"I don't care about your husband's name, Lydia."

She held out her right hand and the two shook hands.

"You're quite a young bride. Are you enjoying your honeymoon?"

".....Yes."

"But you don't seem suited to your husband. You're not used to dealing with the nobility, right? He likes showy places. And he's the type who's always had his pick of women. When his passion cools, you'll end up locked away at home. It's quite difficult for women to seek divorce, but even if the man fools around as much as he likes, he'll face no recrimination."

"Please, stop." Lydia couldn't help speaking out. "You have no right to say such things. He's very kind and always cares a great deal about me."

True Edgar was very popular, was true nobility, and suited elegant places more than anyone else, so it was only natural that he didn't seem suited for her. But he swore his love would not change for as long as he lived.

Aeris looked at her gently as though watching over an ignorant girl. She chuckled and pointed at the stairs that could be seen below the chandelier.

A lone woman was working her way down the stairs. While she wore a gorgeous dress, it didn't suit the lady and gave the impression she'd been forced to wear it. It seemed she couldn't walk well and she staggered as she took small steps.

"She has chains on her legs. Her husband did that to prevent her from running away. It's like she's a slave. She said that she might end up being killed."

"Y-you're kidding."

"Be careful. Marriage is a prison. You'll spend your life always afraid of your husband's mood." Lydia stood frozen in disbelief as Aeris whispered those words softly in Lydia's before leaving.

"Is this where you were, Lady Ashenbert." Lady Newman came and spoke to Lydia almost immediately after Aeris left. "The men have all left for the smoking room. So us ladies were thinking of having dessert together."

She took Lydia's hand warmly as Lydia nodded. She then leaned close as though discussing something secret, and asked, "You were just speaking to that black-haired woman, weren't you? Did she say anything strange to you?"

Lydia looked up in surprise.

"Do you know her?"

"Since we've been staying here so long, we're acquainted with one another. But you shouldn't get too close to her. I've heard some bad rumours about her."

"Rumours....."

Lady Newman nodded. "I've heard that even though she's supposed to be a high noble, her husband is quite elderly and is in a difficult position not having been blessed with an heir. And that's why she's living here at this resort on her own."

"Umm..." Lydia said not understanding very well.

Perhaps it was for Lydia's sake, or perhaps it was because she wanted to tell her some steamy gossip, but Lady Newman lowered her voice even further and whispered, "Supposedly if the lady should become with child, it'll be raised as the heir. I've heard that a number of men chosen by her husband visit her room."

Lady Newman watched amused as Lydia's eyes widened in surprise.

"B-but....."

"It's like she's a prostitute, right? There's no way a proper lady could bear such." Lady Newman frowned almost as though wanting to say that Aeris was sullied.

But if that were true, it wasn't Aeris who was at fault. Perhaps she said such things earlier because she'd been hurt by an unwanted marriage.

At that moment, Lydia heard a woman's scream. Surprised, she turned and looked to at the stairs. A large man was trying to drag the lady who was unable to walk well away with him. Perhaps he was her husband. Just as she thought they were arguing about something, th man raised his cane and struck the woman.

Lydia immediately ran over.

"Stop it! Striking a lady is the absolute worst!"

The man still didn't stop. Lydia grabbed hold of him but ended up being struck on the shoulder as he swung his cane. He then threw her off him, and Lydia slipped on the stairs. Fortunately, she didn't fall down the flight, but her breath caught as she hit her back and legs hard.

"You're a woman, don't interfere," he spat out before dragging his wife off.

Lydia had trouble getting to her feet because of the pain when Lady Newman slowly approached and helped her.

"Thank you....."

"You surprised me," she said in disbelief. "I won't say anything about this incident to anyone. Not to mention your husband would no doubt be quite embarrassed to hear that you grabbed hold of a man."

Ahh, that's right. Lydia had run out as she'd always done until now, but she couldn't always act like the strange Carlton girl.

".....Thank you for your discretion. I'll be returning to my room."

"That would probably be best."

Chapter 2: The Women Who Have Vanished

"My, Mrs. Lydia, you even have bruises on your back from being hit," Kelly said the next morning as she helped Lydia get dressed. Seeing things in the light, Lydia found she had bruises on her shoulders, arms, legs... all over her body.

"I won't be able to wear any evening dresses that or open in the back for a while."

"Your arms, too. Either you'll have to wear dresses with sleeves or longer gloves. Do your legs hurt?"

"A little, but walking shouldn't be a problem."

"I'll get a compress."

"Thank you, Kelly."

Lydia felt pathetic as she sat down on the chair.

Kelly laughed. "Still, you surprised me last night. I thought perhaps you'd gotten into a scuffle."

When she returned to the suite, Lydia's hair was tumbling down her back, so perhaps it might have looked that way.

"Well, it was something like that."

'I'm glad to have a lady's maid that isn't too formal,' Lydia thought.

Kelly knew Lydia as she normally was very well.

"Still, to raise their hand against a lady. There are some terrible men out there, aren't there?"

"Please don't tell Edgar about yesterday."

"Of course, I told the master that you were tired and had gone to bed already."

Kelly would protect her secret. If it were Raven, no doubt he would tell Edgar the truth. In any case, Lydia had woken and gotten dressed early in order to hide from Edgar that she'd done something unladylike and that she'd fallen ignominiously and ended up badly bruised. She was thankful that her afternoon dress would hide all the bruises.

"Mrs. Lydia, she I put fresh milk out on the window sill?"

"Ah, yes, if you could, please. I wonder if some of the milk's gone."

There were many fae in Bretagne. Lydia quickly noticed the little fairies and decided to set some milk out on the sill for them to show she was friendly.

"Yes. Also, the fae left a little gift."

Kelly put an acorn on the dresser. Even though it was her first time coming to this place, by being able to interact with the fae like this, Lydia felt as though the land itself was welcoming her. Perhaps because the fae were like reflections of the earth or the weather. Along with the water, the air, the earth, and all the living animals, the fae were like spirits of nature.

Just as Lydia sighed, Raven brought tea. Thinking that perhaps Edgar had woken, the door to the bedroom opened.

"You're an early riser, aren't you, Lydia?"

"Good morning, Edgar. I'm sorry about leaving first yesterday."

"No need to worry about that, but are you feeling better?"

He smiled gently at Lydia and stroked her hair then pulled her into a loose embrace. Seeing him in only a gown in the sunlit room always made her feel embarrassed because his bare chest was right before her when he pulled her to him.

"I was only a little tipsy. Ah, Raven's prepared tea." Lydia did her best to act nonchalant as she moved away from Edgar and sat down at the table.

"If you'd said something, I would have left early, too. I thought you were still talking with the other ladies."

Lydia could only feel sorry at Edgar's truly concerned look. "But... it looked like you were enjoying yourself, too."

"Being with you is much more enjoyable."

Lydia managed to look away from the hot look he always gave her and took a sip of tea.

"In any case, we haven't made any definite plans for today, so relaxing here wouldn't be bad."

Just the two of them relaxing would no doubt mean that she'd be faced with Edgar's sweet-talk and affection.

"Eh, th-that would be such a waste. We've come all this way to Bretagne, after all."

"But you're tired from all the travelling we've been doing, right? We'll be staying here for a while, so staying in for one day....."

"I've got lots of energy!" Lydia regretted being so emphatic. It could be that her reaction was what Edgar wanted—in a number of ways.

Edgar gazed at Lydia with his chin in his hand and smiled delighted. "Really? In that case, that's fine. This is our honeymoon, after all."

Edgar's happy expression clouded over when their quiet morning was

suddenly interrupted by someone banging at their door. They could only wonder at how violently the person was banging on their door. Kelly stood to answer the door, but Raven went to answer it before her. Asking who was calling through the door, the person on the other side yelled the name Slope. Lydia didn't know the name, and Edgar, too, cocked his head to one side.

"How shall I proceed, my lord."

"Open it."

As soon as Raven opened the door, a large man entered. He immediately strode towards Lydia when he caught sight of her, but Edgar stood in blocking the way.

"What is it you want? Coming all of a sudden like this is most impolite."

"That's the woman! What have you done with my wife?" the man yelled as he pointed at Lydia.

Lydia recognised him as the man who'd pushed her the previous day, but she had no idea what he was talking about.

"No doubt you're hiding my wife, so I'll have you let me search for her!"

"I refuse. Kindly leave."

Edgar held the man back by the shoulder. The man tried to knock Edgar's

hand away, only to immediately be thrown against the wall by Raven.

The hotel staff ran over to the man. "Mr. Slope, please calm down!"

A number of people helped the man get up and removed him from the room. The person who seemed to be the manager remained and bowed to Edgar. "I apologise for the disturbance, Earl Ashenbert. To be frank, Mrs. Slope has been missing since this morning."

"Eh, you mean she's not in the hotel?" Lydia interrupted unthinking.

"Yes. Oddly enough, no one has seen her."

"But, the lady..... um, she has difficulty walking, right? I don't think she'd be able to get very far on her own."

"Lydia, do you know the lady?"

Surprised, Lydia hesitated unsure what to say. She was keeping what had happened yesterday a secret from Edgar.

"Umm, I happened to catch sight of her. Since she was with the man who came just now, I figured she was his wife....." she said coming up with an excuse.

"I see. Still, Mr. Slope said you were hiding his wife. I wonder where that accusation came from."

Naturally, that's because Lydia had come rushing out and tried to protect his wife. Lydia broke into a cold sweat as she tried to think of another excuse when the manager said, "Perhaps it's because of that." He pointed at the glass of milk left by the window. "Apparently, Mrs. Slope also left milk by the window every day. Supposedly it's some sort of charm. Is it popular?"

"Yes..... a little."

"When Mr. Slope mentioned it, I realised that I sometimes see rooms with it there. Perhaps he thought that you learned of it from Mrs. Slope--in other words that you were so close as to converse with one another."

Edgar looked like he accepted that reason, but Lydia didn't notice. Nor did she notice when the manager left. She was lost in thought wondering if Mrs. Slope knew about leaving milk for the fae in order to get along with them. Also, he sometimes saw others doing the same? But it was something that had been told throughout the years. So it wouldn't be unusual for people to know about it even now. Lydia wondered if perhaps Mrs. Slope believed in the fae.

"Edgar, I'm going to ask around and see what I can find out."

Lydia ran out of the room as soon as she decided on her next course of action. She hurried into the salon and checked the other guests' windows from the large balcony there. One window with a glass nearby caught her attention. While there might be others, she couldn't check the rooms with windows facing the sea. As it was, Lydia then hurried to the room where she saw the glass in the window.

"Mrs. Lydia." Kelly hurried down the stairs. "You mustn't go out alone."

"It's alright, Kelly. I won't leave the hotel."

"Please, allow me accompany you. Otherwise, it looks like I'll be sent on an

errand with Mr. Raven." Lydia laughed softly at Kelly's look of utter dismay.

"Do you still not get along with Raven?"

"Ten minutes with him in the carriage is my limit. When we talk, we don't see to be talking about quite the same thing, never mind the fact that he doesn't respond much when I talk to him in the first place. Even so, it's awkward staying silent, and when I talk on my own, he asks things like "what is the purpose of this conversation"! And he glares at me with a most frightening expression!" Kelly sighed, but Lydia couldn't help wondering if Raven was many times more dismayed by things. After all, even though he didn't respond, or glared at her, Kelly was the type of girl who would still try her best to lighten the mood and speak to him.

"Raven doesn't mean any harm by it."

"How should I put it. He's the type that never relaxes."

"In that case, will you come with me? That's right, Kelly, there are lots of lady's maids staying here at the hotel, aren't there? Maybe there are some people here that you'll feel more comfortable talking to than Raven."

But Kelly just shrugged. "Lady Newman was it? Her followers and even their lady's maids are very snobbish, so when I mentioned I was from the Hebrides, they treated me like a country bumpkin..... Come to think of it Mrs. Lydia, I heard that there have been a number of incidents in the past where ladies disappeared from this hotel. One of the lady's minions lady's maid's overheard the hotel's maids talking about it, and the ladies were gossiping about it."

"Is it true?"

"Most likely the manager would never say anything about it, but it's rather creepy, isn't it?"

It certainly was an unusual story. But it was a rumour, and it might have been a coincidence. As she was talking to Kelly, they finally reached the room she was aiming for.

But juts as she was about to knock, someone called out to her and stopped her. "What are you doing, Lydia?" It was the black-haired woman from the night before.

"Aeris..... Um, I just heard about it a moment ago, but Mrs. Slope..."

Aeris raised her index finger as though telling Lydia to be quiet. Standing behind her was another young lady. Aeris gestured for Lydia and the lady she'd brought to follow her as she opened the door and entered the room. Lydia realised that the room must be Aeris's.

Lydia sat down on the chair Aeris offered while the other lady looked at her curiously.

"You also ended up marrying against your will, didn't you?"

"Eh?"

"I know. You're in an east-facing room, right? As soon as you arrived yesterday, you placed a glass of milk by the window."

"Um, about that... there's a glass by the window in this room, too....."

"In my room, too. I'm glad to gain another sister."

"Sister?"

Lydia didn't understand, but according to what that lady said, she had to break up with her suitor and forced to marry another man.

"Mrs. Slope was also one of our sisters. I wonder where she disappeared to."

In other words, by sister, perhaps she meant ladies that didn't get along well with their husbands. And the glass of milk was their sign in order to be able to identify one another. Which meant Aeris was also in the same situation. The gossip Lady Newman shared the night before flashed across Lydia's mind.

"Sadly, things couldn't happen soon enough for her," Aeris said calmly. "She said that her husband would kill her one of these days, and that's what happened."

"Y-you mean she was killed?!" Lydia asked surprised, but Aeris only nodded. "B-but her husband was searching frantically for her."

Kelly was quite calm about it. "He'd probably at least try to make a show of that in order to avoid suspicion."

"Aeris, do you hate men?" Lydia asked. She'd had that attitude yesterday, too.

Aeris stared at Lydia for a long moment then smiled gently. "It seems there are a number of rumours about me. Do you think I'm corrupt?"

".....Forgive me for asking such a rude question."

"It's just a rumour."

Lydia felt relieved at her firm denial.

"I-I see.I'm glad."

"But even if it's not me, some poor ladies are in that situation."

Perhaps she was making fun of Lydia's simplicity.

Aeris pursed her lips coldly. "What would you do if you were faced with a lady in that situation?"

Lydia had never thought of such a situation. Not to mention she still couldn't understand very well. For Lydia, marriage was a bond based on love and trust. Because that's how it was for her parents, that was her image of the ideal marriage. While Edgar was very different from her image of the ideal man, she could no longer think of anyone for her but him. So the idea of being killed by one's husband or being forced to do something one couldn't bear doing, while she knew such things weren't impossible, they seemed to be things more from stories than reality.

"If it were me, I would set her free." Aeris's almond-shaped eyes narrowed as she stared into the distance. "Even if it meant killing the husband."

"....."

Aeris looked at Lydia as she gasped in surprise. She suddenly started laughing. "I'm kidding."

"Yes, after all, there are many other ways to free her.Still, the poor girl. After all, she's come all this way." The other lady murmured meaningfully.

Lydia still couldn't follow the conversation. But before she could ask, Aeris stood up.

"Now, both of you should get going. The men will become wary with this sort

of thing happening. In order to keep your husbands from becoming suspicious, it would be better for us not to appear close."

Lydia was shown out of the room even though she didn't understand what was meant by her statement. The other lady, following Aeris's instructions, quickly left the area, so Lydia couldn't ask her either. Why was there any need for women who'd ended up marrying against their will to be able to know who one another were? And who decided that the signal for it would be a glass of milk by the window? Was Mrs. Slope really killed?

"She's an unusual person, isn't she? That black haired lady," Kelly said suddenly.

"Yes, but I don't think she's a bad person."

Returning to the first floor hall, Lydia happened to glance out the window. A person's figure passed by among the trees. A woman..... in a black jacket? Lydia caught a glimpse of her face in profile for only an instant, and stared in surprise. However, the figure disappeared when she was blinked.

"Mrs. Lydia, is something the matter?"

Kelly, was there a person there just now?"

"I didn't see anyone."

Perhaps it was her imagination, but she felt like she saw Ermine. Edgar's former colleague and Raven's sister who'd become a selkie. She was supposed to have betrayed Edgar and obeying Ulysses who was one of the prince's people. Was it possible for Ermine to be here in Bretagne?

"Was it someone you know?"

".....No, it's okay. I was probably mistaken." Lydia very quickly forgot about the figure because she was that uncertain about what she'd seen, and so great a problem would happen soon thereafter.

"Oy, Lydia, come here a moment," Nico's voice called out. He ran over on two legs and gestured for her to come outside.

"Wait, Nico. You're not supposed to go walking around the hotel on two legs."

"It's not like anyone will notice."

Following Nico to the gazebo in the inner courtyard, she heard a voice come from the roots of the shrubs.

(Master Cat, is that the fairy doctor?)

"Wee fae, I told you, I'm not a cat."

Lydia peered into the foliage and spotted pointed ears and what resembled a little imp's horn moving there. Three little fairies of a type Lydia hadn't seen before were looking up at her.

Like Lydia, Kelly also stared at the bush bursting with curiosity, but it seemed she couldn't see them—she was looking around trying to find them.

"Are you Nico's friends?"

"We just met. They're called corrigans."

(Are you really a fairy doctor?)

(I thought there weren't anymore around here.)

"I'm a fairy doctor from Scotland. But I think I can probably help you."

(She must be the real thing. After all, it seems like she can hear us.)

(As long as she isn't one of the princess's friends. The ones in the sea are so stuck-up.)

"Princess?"

(The princess of the capital city. Of the sea that is.)

(In any case, please help.)

"Yes, you're right. And what happened?"

(This came falling from the top of the cliff and hit me right on the head.)

The little fairy held up the broken handle from a cane.

(A lump of iron fell with it and is blocking the entrance to our home.)

(That's not all, my wife got flattened under it.)

"That's terrible. You should've said that first. Where's your home?"

(It's under the bluff this building's on.)

(If we don't get it off her soon, my wife'll get angry. Not to mention galettes that fly through the sky will be coming soon!)

(Ohh, flying galettes are the best.)

(I wonder if they'll come this year, too.)

(Of course they'll come!)

(That's right, fairy doctor. Have you tried them yet?)

I wonder what galettes are.

"Well..... I'd like to try them. But rather than that, your wife's more important, right?"

While she was curious about what they were talking about, she knew that she wouldn't be able to keep the conversation under control when it came to things that the fae seemed very interested in, so she quickly brought the conversation back on topic.

(That's right, rather than that, my wife!

In any case, if the fairies's home was at the bottom of the cliff the hotel was on, most likely it wouldn't be easy for Lydia to get down there.

"Hey, what was the clump of iron? You mean a frypan?"

"I don't know. It looked like shackles with chains on them.)

Why would something like that come falling from the top of a cliff? Lydia cocked her head to one side and stared absentmindedly at the cane the fairy held. It was only a broken handle now, but she had the feeling she'd seen it somewhere. Eh.....? Could it be.....

Yesterday, on the stairs in the hall. It was similar to the one Mr. Slope had swung at his wife. And looking more closely at it, she saw bloody long hair stuck on it.

"Kelly..... get Edgar....." Lydia somehow managed to say that as she staggered to her feet struggling not to be sick.

It was Francis.

Edgar stopped and stared at the gentleman standing on the terrace at one

end of the hallway as he stared down at the sea below. Since Lydia still hadn't come back, Edgar had just left the suite thinking he'd see how she was doing. Spotting the man with the eyepatch and wavy silvery hair, Edgar thought he'd verify something, so he followed the man.

Francis left the hallway and spoke to the woman on the terrace. The woman's black hair was lightly done up. He thought she was a guest at the hotel, but his breath caught when she turned and he caught sight of her profile. A memory instantly came back to him--under the bright sun at Sylvanford. Sharp almond shaped eyes that looked his way from under a black parasol.

'One day, you'll kill your parents. And you'll bring about the destruction of your house.'

Fighting back dizziness, Edgar took a deep breath. She definitely looked like the woman from that time. But that was from over ten years ago. If she were the same person, it was as though she hadn't aged at all. A child's memories are very vague. It could be that 20-year-old women and women over 30 would've been seen the same--as adult women.

Their brief exchange of words was so casual, it was impossible to tell if Francis knew the woman or if he'd just happened to speak to her. The woman soon left. Left behind, Francis just stood there and stared at the distant sea.

"Raven, find out what you can about that woman."

Raven nodded, and Edgar left him and headed towards Francis. Francis stood motionless as though he were a statue. Edgar stopped in surprise when he noticed a tear glittering as it slid down Francis's cheek. However, the deep sorrow and anger hidden in that profile was wiped out in an instant. Most likely because he sensed Edgar's presence. By the time Francis turned, he was no longer someone overwhelmed by the feelings inside him. Rather, he had the peaceful expression of someone buried in sentimental memories.

“.....Hey, Edgar, were you staying here, too? What a coincidence. I just arrived.” He scrubbed his cheek embarrassed.

“Is this also one of the places from the past?”

“Yeah, the last place we were together was on this coast.”

“I see.”

“You caught me at a bad moment. It's strange to still be so attached to a woman, isn't it?”

He shrugged.

The gentle demeanor and calm manner of speech. The striking silver hair tied back in a pony tail, too, didn't seem familiar. Even if he'd had both eyes when they supposedly met before, Edgar thought he had a good memory for people.

“I don't think so. If Lydia were to disappear, no doubt I would wander about seeking any trace of her.”

Apparently Francis was rather surprised at that. No doubt he'd been convinced that Edgar had no principles when it came to women.

“You really are completely smitten by her, aren't you?”

Edgar nodded and smiled. “Even if I hit on the Postners's sweet daughter, I couldn't forget about Lydia. It seems you're unaware of it, so I'll warn you. But if you happen to meet Lord Postner again, it would be better not to mention me.”

“Did you do something?”

“Not really. Lord Postner was angry when I told him that my heart was already set on marrying someone even though I never even kissed the young lady.”

Edgar drew close to Francis as he laughed.

“So Francis, if perchance you're after Lydia, there's no telling what I'll do.”

His blue eyes reflected Edgar's ash-mauve ones. A hint of panic showed in them.

“Why did you want to speak to me?” Edgar asked without preamble. “We've never actually met, have we?”

Francis stepped back as though defeated by Edgar's presence. He hung his head like a child who's been scolded. “Sorry..... But I wanted to become friends.”

His comment was almost like that of a young boy who just started boarding school.

“Huh? You mean you've always been making friends by suddenly pretending you've known the person all the time?”

“I've never made friends up until now,” he answered flatly.

Despite his disbelief, Edgar couldn't help finding the situation funny. “Then why did you find out what you could about me and try to become friends with me?”

“I wanted to make sure you were the real thing.”

“By 'the real thing'?”

“.....That's right. Lord Ibrazel—Edgar Ashenbert. It seems that really is your name. But are you really the earl of fae lands? It's generally considered that Ibrazel's just a name attached to that rank, right? So, I wanted to know what you yourself actually thought about it. Are you really a descendant of the Blue Knight Earl who's said to have ruled over fae lands and was the lord of real fairies?”

Edgar took a deep breath at the unexpected answer. He'd been asking himself the same question. Naturally, Edgar wasn't the descendant of the Blue Knight Earl, but he was betting everything trying to become the real earl. In order to eliminate the Prince of Calamity, who had plans to lead the Unseelie Court against England in order to take his revenge, and in order to protect Lydia and

the earl's house, he had to continue to be the real earl. While Francis seemed to be interested in the fae, his trying to get to know him because of his curiosity was nothing more than a bother.

“Why does that matter to you?” he asked deliberately sounding annoyed.

“The woman I loved said she came from Ibrazel.”

Surprised, Edgar didn't know what to ask next. He stared at Francis almost glaring at him, and Francis stared seriously back at him.

At that moment, Kelly's voice interrupted them. “Master! Trouble! Mrs. Lydia.....”

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The hotel soon came to be in an uproar. Mrs. Slope's shackles and shoes were found at the base of the cliff the building stood on almost directly below the room the Slopes were staying in. After hearing from Lydia what had happened, Edgar then informed the manager. Shortly thereafter, the police and hotel staff climbed down the sheer cliff and found a strip of cloth from a dress and the remnants of some blood on a boulder. It seemed that, after falling from the window, the lady hit the boulder and the shackles came off. But no doubt most people were wondering why there were shackles on the wife of a wealthy house let alone why there were signs of blood on the cane.

They tried to speak to the husband, but Mr. Slope disappeared immediately after the commotion began. The manager came to Lydia's room and looked down when he explained that they didn't find the wife's body, so it most likely

fell into the ocean and was swept away.

“Why there are strange rumours of women being enticed to the beautiful capital city at the bottom of the ocean, reality is most cruel.”

Lydia and Kelly exchanged looks.

“Do you mean the rumours of ladies disappearing from this hotel in the past?”

“From this hotel? No. I've heard that women who have stayed here have disappeared, but it occurred after they'd finished checking out and left the hotel. It's the first time something like this has happened.”

“The capital city..... at the bottom of the sea” The little fairies seeking Lydia's help also mentioned it. Remembering it, she couldn't help wondering about it.

“It's a legend in this area. The royal city that controlled Bretagne in the past is said to be somewhere in the middle of the sea. However, the princess there is said to have been a wild, wicked woman, and the capital city ended up sinking to the bottom of the sea after she was betrayed by her lover. It's said that the princess hates men and created a paradise at the bottom of the sea for women. She only invites unhappy women and kills any men who try to go near there. In these parts, the deaths of fishermen and seamen are said to be because of the princess.”

“The princess didn't die even though the capital city sank?” Kelly asked genuinely curious.

“Legend has it that her mother was one of the fae. So even though the capital has disappeared, it's believed that she's alive somewhere.”

Perhaps the princess invited women who'd been betrayed as she had been. Could it be that Mrs. Slope, who might have been killed by her husband, had been saved by the princess? Lydia wondered. She was lost in thought when the manager left as her thoughts turned to Aeris. Aeris said things hadn't been in time. She wondered what would being in time would've meant.

“The tidal range in this area is very great. They said that come high tide, most likely the shoes, bloodstains, and cane wouldn't have been found, and any proof that the wife might have been murdered would most likely have vanished.” Edgar said upon returning to the room after explaining the situation to the police.

“It's all thanks to the fae.”

Most likely, if they only had the shackles, no one would have believed they were Mrs. Slope's.

“It's because a fairy doctor was here.

But her life couldn't be saved. Even so, it wasn't as though a total stranger like Lydia had been able to do anything.

Most likely, whatever she could have done would've been on the same level as being shoved away by Mr. Slope as had happened the day before.

“I said that a cat had found that cane, so if they ask you about it, you should

say the same thing.” Edgar had grabbed Nico and held him up in front of the police identifying him as the cat.

Until a short while ago, Nico had been complaining at length to Lydia about being treated like a cat, and he now sat in an armchair in front of the fireplace extremely put out by the event. Still upset, he was pouting and moved his tail restlessly.

Remembering the cane, Lydia remembered the blood stuck to it. The wife had been struck by that cane the previous day as well. It had been used against Lydia, too, when she tried to intervene. And as a result, she'd ended up slipping on the stairs, but from that sheer cliff, Mrs. Slope..... Lydia trembled as she remembered the chill she'd felt at that time.

Edgar knelt before the chair Lydia sat in and looked at her concerned. “You don't look well. It's not surprising; it's a terrible incident.”

“I'm okay. And most likely the Corrigan's wife has been saved as well, so I was able to be of some help as a fairy doctor.”

Edgar smiled slightly. “Still, Lydia. When Kelly came running over, I was worried sick that something had happened to you.”

“You're kidding, really? So that's why you looked so worried when you came.”

Even when directly faced with a terrible occurrence, as long as Edgar was there, Lydia was able to regain her composure. Edgar, on the other hand, looked down pensively and frowned as though tormented. He pressed his forehead to Lydia's knees. It was much more intimate than having him hold her

and seemed as though he was seeking comfort. Lydia couldn't help feeling a bit flustered, and struggled to remain still.

“I wonder if we should have come here,” he murmured softly.

Despite her confusion, Lydia reached out and buried her fingers in his blond hair.

“To be honest, I'm not sure about learning everything about the earl's household.”

Lydia was trying to find out whatever she could about the Blue Knight Earl's house and Ibrazel. But Edgar had seemed a bit reluctant half-joking that it was their honeymoon. Perhaps it wasn't all that surprising. Lydia was surprised when she realised how he felt.

“The merrow and Banshee and many of the fae have accepted me. But as we try to get closer to the mysteries of the earl's household, it may be that something fundamental will show that I'm unfit to be the earl.”

And if that happened, it could be that Edgar felt he would be unable to eliminate the prince's memories that he carried within him. In England and the human realm, Edgar's position was secure. As the earl of Faerie, the queen's retainer, and as a member of the nobility, there was no doubt he could readily support his household. But those couldn't help him fight against the prince.

“Edgar, it's all right. Even if we can't get hold of everything there is to the earl's household, I'm sure another way will be revealed. After all, you've come this far opening up your own path to the future that way.

Edgar looked up at Lydia and smiled slightly. "You're right. As long as you're with me, I can become stronger." He pulled Lydia's hand towards him and kissed her fingertips and then her wrist. He slid his lips towards the bare skin covered by her sleeves, but Lydia unthinkingly pulled her hand away when she remembered that she had bruises on her arms. Fortunately, before Edgar could wonder why, there was a knock at the door.

"My lord, Mr. Finistère is here," Raven announced.

Edgar quickly stood as though trying to switch gears. "Ah, that's right. I needed to ask him about the lady who'd come from Ibrazel."

"Eh? From Faerie?"

Edgar held a hand out for Lydia and with impeccable style, he escorted her to the drawing room next door.

The lady Francis was in love with is said to have come from Ibrazel. Apparently, she'd been on a mission dealing with Faerie, but he had no information about her after that. Francis admitted that he thought she was an unusual lady that was prone to flights of fancy. The megaliths and pink cliffs that continued all along the coast and the deep forests that surrounded springs and ruins gave the Bretagne landscape a mysterious feel. It felt like a strange magical world lay hidden very close to the everyday world. That's why he thought what she said was true. More than reality, he believed what she said, believed in the Fae realm, and just wanted to be together with her. It was only after she disappeared that Francis found out that someone called the Earl of Ibrazel actually existed among the English nobility.

Edgar Ashenbert. Wondering if that man was the one who gave her that mission, if the fae realm really exist like she said and if he came from there, Francis hired a detective to look into him. And just when he was considering heading to London, he learned that the earl was in Paris and so he sought his chance to meet the man.

“May I ask what the lady's name was?” Lydia asked in Edgar's stead. He'd fallen silent after listening to Francis's explanation.

“Diana. She asked me to call her that, but I don't even know if it's her real name.”

“Francis, I'm afraid I don't know that lady. Nor have I given anyone any such mission.”

Francis sighed. “Does Ibrazel really exist?” he asked as though wanting to know for sure.

Edgar frowned and looked like he was uncertain.

“It exists,” Lydia stated firmly.

Perhaps Edgar thought the existence of the place which made up part of his name had nothing to do with him. Even more so if the unknown woman Diana was working for the sake of that place. But even so, Lydia wanted to connect Edgar to the land of the fae, and she felt might be able to do so, too. Since she was the earl's house's fairy doctor, she should be able to do so.

“After all, it's one of our territories, right Edgar?”

Edgar said that he couldn't talk about the fae realm with outsiders cutting off any further questions. It wasn't surprising. He couldn't tell Francis that he was the Blue Knight Earl even though he was unrelated to the Blue Knight Earl's house. However, if he broke the conversation, they too couldn't ask more involved questions about the woman Francis knew who'd come from the faerie realm. And in the end, neither side was able to learn what they wanted to.

What was it that that woman was trying to do for the fae realm. Could it be that relatives of the earl and his retainers still lived in Faerie? Was it possible that other such members have also come to the human realm? What did they think of the prince—the one the earl's house was to eradicate.

“Francis doesn't know any more than that. Even if we told him the truth about the earl's house, there was nothing more to be learned.”

“You're..... right.” Lydia nodded.

The mood in the room changed slightly as Edgar sat on the edge of the bed. Lydia's heart skipped a beat at that slight signal. She took a deep breath trying to calm herself down, but it didn't help much.

“But it could be that there'll be some other clue to the fae realm here in Bretagne. And the red moonstone ring is no doubt somewhere..... I think it's become even more probably.”

The room was faintly lit as the moonlight shone through the thin curtains. Lydia looked up. Even in the faint light, she could clearly make out his purple eyes.

“Are you going to look into it?”

“That's why we came, right?”

“.....It's our honeymoon.”

Edgar chuckled softly when Lydia said that and gently kissed her. Lydia quickly looked away when she saw him with his nightshirt unbuttoned.

“While I'm uneasy about learning about the land of the fae, I'm not having any second thoughts about it. I have to learn everything and become the earl in the true sense. In order for you to be happy, as well.”

He stroked Lydia's hair as she lay down. He ran his hand along her hairline from her cheek to her nape. At times like these, Edgar was always extremely gentle. From the very first time, he neither frightened or flustered her. He was very different from his usual forceful or teasing self, and Lydia could feel how much he cared about her. Each time their lips touched, her tension slowly melted away, and she felt she liked those kisses.

However, things didn't go as usual that day.

“.....No..... wh-what are you doing.....?” Lydia asked as she tensed up.

"But" Edgar looked down at her uncertainly as she tried to push him away with both hands. "Lydia, don't you think it's about time to take this off?"

The elegant lacy and frilly French nightwear got caught on Lydia's shoulder after the ribbon became undone. Edgar stretched a hand out towards it, but Lydia quickly held the collar closed as she sat up trying to get away.

".....There's no need to do that, right?"

"It's normally done that way."

"You're kidding!"

She'd never learned about taking everything off. Even getting down to one piece of underwear took a lot of courage. It was natural for a lady to keep as much skin from being seen as possible, and she'd thought men would take that into consideration. No, perhaps she'd been mistaken in thinking that?

"But all this time..... you never said anything about it."

"You were so self-conscious about it, so I thought it would be okay for the first while."

"B-but the naked body's so unsightly!"

"Really? Do you think I'm unsightly?"

He held her face in both hands. She stared at him desperately. He'd long since taken off his nightclothes, so she had no choice but to look him in the eye.

".....I'm talking about me."

"Why do you think that?"

"But you've probably embellished your image of me."

Lydia thought that the linen gathers and lace softly enhanced her poor figure. If she had nothing on, she was sure he wouldn't like how it felt to hold her.

"It's alright. It's not like I know nothing after all."

Lydia blushed startled. She then remembered that Edgar had been the one to remove an object that had become embedded in her back.

"B-but.....that time, Kelly....."

"Ah, yeah. True. Kelly's the one who took your clothes off. Not to mention that wasn't the time for such things, so I don't remember too much," he said hastily.

Lydia was almost in tears.

"But it's something you can tell when embrace someone. You're pretty much exactly as I imagined."

He smiled, but for some reason she didn't like that thought. Not to mention she had bruises on her arm and back at the moment. If she took off her

nightwear, he'd end up noticing them.

"It's better not to have anything keeping us apart, right?"

But undoubtedly the deep purple bruises on her skin were unsightly. What if he became disillusioned? Even without the bruises, he might end up disillusioned. After all, Edgar's known so many women much sexier than her..... Ahh, she..... couldn't do it!

Panicking, Lydia turned desperately as she pulled away from Edgar.

"I can't do that!I never thought you were that sort of person!" she cried out. Completely flustered, Lydia fled from the bedroom.

"Mrs. Lydia, any way you look at it, I think the master was wrong." Kelly said. She lay her hand on Lydia's shoulder as Lydia lay face down on the sofa. Kelly had shown up in Lydia's dressing room shortly after she'd locked herself away in it. No doubt Edgar had asked Kelly to try to calm Lydia down.

"It's wrong to force someone even if it's your own wife."

"Y-you're right."

Lydia looked up not having expected Kelly's indignation.

"There's no way for a lady to know what people normally do. It hasn't even been a month since you married. The master is being too impatient."

"Kelly, is that really normally done?" Lydia asked surprised.

Kelly held Lydia's hand trying not to confuse her. "It doesn't matter whether it's commonplace or not. Mrs. Lydia, would a proper gentleman refuse to consider what his beloved wife wanted even if it is somewhat unreasonable? Even though the master is young, I thought he was wonderful and took pride in being an honourable nobleman."

I wonder if I said something unreasonable.

Lydia began to feel more and more uncertain.

"But..... he's never tried to force me knowing I was feeling embarrassed."

"Still, that doesn't mean you have to do what he says. Even if you ignore that, you're going through a lot of hardship and suffering for the master's sake."

Lydia felt that the two issues were not the same.

".....It was just so sudden, I was surprised by it. If he absolutely insists..... I'm not completely against....." Lydia was taken aback at what she said. "But Kelly, it's just not possible right now! You understand, don't you? I still have all these bruises on my arms and back. So, I..... got scared. Please, don't misunderstand. Edgar's done nothing wrong."

Lydia gripped Kelly's hand as she pleaded with her. Kelly smiled. "I understand completely. If you're not upset with the master, will you not return to the bedroom?"

Lydia finally realised that even though her lady's maid was a year younger, Kelly was much better at dealing with things than Lydia. On top of taking Lydia's side, Kelly advised her well. Thinking about things calmly, Lydia realised what had happened wasn't something to run fleeing from the bedroom over.

"Edgar's not angry?"

"He was disconcerted. Mrs. Lydia, to be honest, the master doesn't stand a chance when it comes to lovers quarrels in the Ashenbert household," Kelly said amused as she retied the ribbon on Lydia's nightgown.

Edgar stood leaning against the wall when Lydia hesitantly returned to the bedroom.

"Lydia, let's rest for tonight. You will at least sleep with me, won't you?"

He walked towards her as she nodded. Surprisingly, his gown was neatly closed, most likely to keep Lydia from becoming distressed. It's possible Kelly had said something to him.

"I... managed to become acquainted with the fae here, right? I think I should be able to learn what ties may exist between Ibrazel and Bretagne from them."

Perhaps what she said was too sudden as Edgar had a strange expression on his face. "Lydia?"

"I'll be of use to you." Lydia couldn't look up, and she struggled to tell him

how she felt. "Edgar, I still have a lot to learn, but I want to become the sort of fairy doctor you're hoping for."

"Yeah, I know."

He slowly embraced her. Lydia could feel his gentleness and love and it was enough to content her. However, his kisses became more and more passionate, and Lydia found herself lying on the bed.

".....Weren't we going to sleep?"

"Umm..... would you prefer that?"

"You're the one who said it."

".....I still want you."

She could hardly bear how hot his hand felt through the fabric as he touched her, so she wondered how it would be if he touched her bare skin. But right now, she felt that he was more attentive than usual as he caressed her. She slowly closed her eyes.

From the very first time, Lydia had had no misgivings and accepted what he did. In a way, what happened seemed almost familiar. And she felt happiness in their joining. So, in order to get to know one another more, no doubt it was only natural to do what he wanted. Although Lydia felt that way, she was also a little afraid. Even while doing this, he was very carefully holding himself back. Lydia had thrown a fit over something like wearing nightwear, so it might not be possible for her to give him everything he was wanting. And she wondered if

Edgar himself might also have sensed that.

Edgar started to put more force into his embrace, but took a deep breath as though to stop himself. Lydia wasn't giving him what he wanted.

Chapter 3: Sense of an Impending Storm

"They had me pretty worried yesterday."

Kelly glanced furtively at the cat as he gracefully picked up the teacup and saucer. Since he was a gentleman, it would be impolite to stare. While she knew that, she couldn't help wanting to watch him.

Kelly took a bite of her breakfast bun and glanced around casually. She was in the dining area reserved for the hotel's guests' attendants. The guests had split into different groups based on nationality, social class, or wealth, and the attendants, too, had their own similar gatherings. Kelly hadn't joined any of the groups, and she found sharing a table with the unusual cat to be much more enjoyable.

It may be that no one noticed Nico because most of them didn't have the wherewithal to spare for the unusual scene unfolding right before their eyes. Ever since she was a child, Kelly had often heard stories about the fae. Even though they and their world were always so close, those who didn't try to see them simply never would. Not to mention, even though one might want to see them, unless the fae wished it, the average person would be unable to see them. Lydia was special.

"We won't have to worry for a while since the two have made up."

Learning that he could get English-style fried fish in that dining room, Nico joined Kelly for the meal. He looked content as he ate. Complaining that French cuisine was overrated, Nico settled in in the attendant's dining hall.

"It's thanks to you. Instead of being able to calm Lydia down, no doubt Raven or I would only have ended up making her become even more stubborn."

"This rain might be just the thing for those two. They put off going out, and are relaxing together." Kelly looked out the window and smiled.

While it had been raining hard this morning, it gave a good opportunity for them to talk.

"Excuse me."

Someone sat in the seat in front of Kelly. It was Raven. Kelly tensed when she realised that. Even though he was a fellow attendant working for the same Ashenbert residence, unless there was need, Raven wouldn't speak to Kelly, and normally, he would eat at a separate table. So she couldn't help feeling confused as to what was going on today.

She couldn't just ignore him since he was right there, but they had nothing in common to talk about.

"Hey, Raven. I thought if those two got married things would settle down more, but things are even more shaky instead. It must be pretty stressful for you."

"Yes."

Raven's expression as he looked at Nico sitting next to her seemed much

softer than any she'd ever seen on him.

"But this stress isn't necessarily bad."

"Well, that's true. Not to mention until recently, they weren't in any position to fight."

The two looked at one another and nodded emphatically.

"Umm, Mr. Raven, you get along well with Mr. Nico, don't you?"

Raven looked at her surprised at her comment. "Miss Kelly, when did you come here?"

He didn't see me? Raven had sat at that table because Nico was sitting there. He hadn't sat there to get to know his co-worker more. Kelly was overcome with exhaustion when she realised that.

He really is a strange person.

"Raven, Kelly's a good lady's maid. Still, Kelly, you must've been pretty surprised when you started working, right? Were you thinking they were on better terms with one another?"

She'd been surprised by some things. She'd had the vague impression that Edgar was intelligent with a strong sense of responsibility and justice and Lydia was a devoted and kind wife who supported him. When they'd been on the island in the highlands, the trust the two had for one another gave the

impression of that sort of couple. But in reality, the earl usually acted like a cheerful mischievous boy who liked to put Lydia on the spot while Lydia firmly rebuffed his unrestrained affection and teasing. But...

"I think they're an extremely close couple."

"So why do things like last night end up happening?"

Raven looked at Kelly seriously.

While he was a strange person, he carried out his duties as an attendant flawlessly, and Kelly felt she could learn something from how he served his master now that things had changed and the earl was married. On that point, Kelly conceded he was the superior.

"Mrs. Lydia is still young. But I don't think there's any cause for concern. Some innocent young ladies end up crying or running away at night after they marry, and it's not unusual to spend days persuading them to carry out their duty as a wife. But the missus doesn't consider it to be a burden."

"That's the only thing Lord Edgar's good at."

He said that looking very serious.

Nico started laughing, and Kelly fought back her laughter.

"In other words, they're getting along extremely well." Kelly stated proudly.

As a lady's maid, she thought it a natural part of her job to watch over the couple's relationship. If the most important duty of the wife of a distinguished house is to bear an heir, it's also very important for the lady's maid. In the supposedly common cases of unwilling marriages, it was necessary to convince the wife to do her duty. And as a lady's maid, she considered it a source of pride that there was no need for her to do that.

"Miss Kelly, do you look young for your age?"

Kelly's eyes widened in surprise at Raven's sudden question.

"Eh? Why?"

"I was wondering if maybe you were really around 30 years old."

"By that..... do you mean I sound old for my age?"

"Yes."

Kelly was shocked and her hand shook as she clenched it in her lap. She was often told that she was very mature for her age. Since she'd always worked for ladies older than herself, her tastes and things she talked about weren't like those of other girls her age. And even though she's never been in love, she couldn't help wondering if she knew a little too much about relationships. But for someone to say such a thing right to her face.

This person is definitely strange!

Perhaps he sensed the tension in the air, but by the time she realised it, Nico had disappeared.

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Long, long ago, when Bretagne was still called Armorica, the royal city that ruled the land still sat upon the sea. The land was so low that it was covered by water when full tide came in, but the city was surrounded by a strong wall and protected by a floodgate.

The king had a lone daughter. It's said that her mother was one of the fae. And the princess had magical abilities and was considered as a witch and feared. The princess refused to accept Christ's teachings, and hated the fiance chosen for her by the sages. She did as she pleased and kept a number of lovers.

Because of that, the city was forsaken by God and it fell into the hands of the devil. The devil tempted the princess's favourite lover—a most beautiful young man—to steal the key from her pillow while she slept. The key was to the keystone that protected the city—its floodgate. That day, by the the devil's own hand, the lock to the floodgate was opened, and sea water instantly flowed into the city. The sages immediately realised the devil's plan, and hurried to save the king and the people. Ringing the alarm bells, they led everyone to the mainland before the sink sank. The princess begged for help as the castle's people prepared boats and horses for the evacuation. However, all of her lovers feared incurring the wrath of god, and they refused to try and help her. Only one man tried to take her on his horse. It was the man the sages had chosen as her betrothed.

However, her sins were so great that the horse was unable to move one step from the sheer weight of them. The sages told the man to lower her from his horse, and having no choice, he obeyed. The instant he did so, she was swallowed by a wave and disappeared. But since the princess carries fae blood, it's said that she still lives in the capital city at the bottom of the sea. Despising all men, she commands the mermaids in the deep sea. She built a paradise only for women, and that is where she now lives.

If any man tries to get near the capital, he will undoubtedly be killed. It's even said that she uses fae magics to lure seamen, drowning them in the sea. The only way one can leave the princess's capital alive is to give her what she wishes. With her fae blood, the princess will save hated men's lives for the one who gives her her wish.

“The poor princess.”

“Even though she had many lovers?”

“In the end, they all betrayed her. So, none of them truly loved her.”

“You're probably right.”

Edgar closed the book and placed it on the table. Edgar read the book on local folk legends out loud after borrowing it from the hotel's library. Lydia sat next to him on the sofa. The sound of the rain closed around them, and it was nice listening to him read.

Unable to go out because of the rain, the two used the time to relax together.

“If only there was someone who hadn't been afraid of her magic or her fae blood. Someone who truly loved her most likely wouldn't have listened to the devil, and it's possible the city would have still been prospering today.....”

Edgar chuckled and his face drew closer to her. “You're lucky, then. You have me.”

“I'm talking about the princess.”

“But you seem to be identifying with her a lot. Don't worry, if we were in the same situation, I would never let you go. If a horse can't carry you, I'll carry you myself.”

His words made it seem as though Lydia was wanting to be comforted. Embarrassed, she looked sulky as she pushed him away.

“I just really like this legend. There's a rumour that a number of ladies have vanished from this hotel and that they were invited to the city at the bottom of the sea. Since it's difficult for a woman to seek divorce, I think that women who wish for such hope to be saved by being taken away to the women's paradise.”

Edgar frowned concerned. “Lydia, please don't be interested in divorce.”

“What are you talking about? If the city really exists, the half-fae princess will also still be alive. It could be that she'll know about Faerie and the red moonstone, right?”

“For some reason, I don't like the idea of you becoming friends with a princess who hates men and endorses divorce.”

“In which case, I wouldn't be able to find anything out.”

“For starters, we should look into finding out what sort of legends exist about the red moonstone, right?”

Certainly, that was why they'd come to Bretagne in the hopes of finding a clue.”

“Yes, but there wasn't anything about it in the collection of local legends. And it seems like father was also unable to find any works containing any details about the legend either, so it might be that the legend isn't very well known.”

“In which case, it could be that people who only speak Breton will be the only ones who know it.”

If that were true, then it wouldn't be easy to find any clues. Lydia was nothing more than a traveller. She had no means of getting to know the locals since she couldn't speak the language. Lydia glanced at the clock while she considered the problem. A great deal of time had passed.

“It's already this late. Edgar, I have a tea party to attend!”

She'd been invited to a lady's only tea party in the afternoon. Lydia quickly got to her feet.

It had stopped raining sometime earlier, and with Lady Newman at the centre of the group, the upper class ladies gathered at the gazebo in the garden. Lydia

joined the group, and while they were chatting idly, someone brought up the previous day's incident involving Mrs. Slope.

“How terrible. To think that her legs had chains on them.”

“It would normally be unthinkable.”

“I wonder if it really was her husband that killed her.”

“Lady Ashenbert, seeing how you've only recently wed, this must be unimaginable, is it not? No doubt, you've never even gotten into an argument with your husband yet.”

Lydia could only give a vague smile.

“But in Mrs. Slope's case, I think it wasn't the same thing as a lover's quarrel. I happened to see the wife being struck by the husband.....”

A number of people nodded and frowned. Apparently, Lydia wasn't the only one to see that happen.

“Even though we saw it, it still has nothing to do with us,” Lady Newman stated decidedly firmly. “After all, she was from the working class.”

In order to help Lydia understand what she meant, Lady Newman sat next to Lydia and leaned in telling her, “Mr. Slope made a fortune after going to America. But supposedly the wife was a servant in his household. She didn't know her place and brought misfortune down upon herself.”

“But I think there are some people who get along well even though they are from different social classes.....”

“That's a fantasy. For a man to want to marry a woman of lowly birth means he doesn't actually his wife. It's something a man does when he wants a slave who cannot escape regardless of what he does. Yet, despite that, she still married that sort of man. Don't you think it was the price she paid for gaining a social position and fortune she didn't deserve?”

Lydia could only sit uncomfortably unable to reply. Fortunately, the topic of Mrs. Slope and Lady Newman's argument was interrupted at that moment. Unfortunately, the mood unsuited to teatime didn't go away. An unexpected figure appeared at the gazebo.

It was Aeris. All the ladies were startled and frowned, but Aeris was unperturbed as she curtsied before Lady Newman.

“Viscountess, I'm sorry to interrupt you like this, but I'm searching for a doctor for an acquaintance of mine who has suddenly taken ill. The town doctor is far away on a house call. Just when I didn't know what to do next, I learned that your husband has some medical knowledge.”

“Sudden illness? That's terrible.”

Lydia started to rise, but Lady Newman was calm and showed no sign of moving.

“My husband no longer works. Ever since gaining his position.”

“I was hoping he might consider it. I was unable to speak to your husband directly, so I was hoping to plead my case with you.”

“Most likely it would be no use even if I passed your message. Not to mention my husband was a physician to the aristocracy.”

“Are you saying that he cannot examine a commoner?” Aeris challenged annoyed.

“That would be the case, would it not?” Lady Newman replied smoothly.

“Um, Lady Newman, could you not at least have your husband consider it?”

Lydia spoke up unable to remain silent any longer, but Lady Newman only looked at her in disbelief.

“Lady Ashenbert, even you are suggesting such a thing? You are a countess, yet you are siding with this woman?”

The other ladies, possibly siding with Lady Newman, looked at Lydia coldly. But 'countess'? She didn't change just because she gained a title like that. Lydia felt more for Aeris's position than she did Lady Newman's. As she walked to where Aeris stood, she wondered if Edgar would be annoyed with her.

“Aeris, I happen to know a doctor. Let's go speak with him.”

Lydia was glad to see Aeris's look of relief.

“Don't do it. Otherwise, you'll be seen as the same as this woman.”

“Lady Newman, most likely I'm not worthy of being friends with the ladies here. I'm not from the upper class, after all.”

Her comment created a stir in the crowd, and everyone looked surprised. But Lydia didn't care. It was the truth, so there no point in hiding it and having them be nice to her.

“If you'll excuse me, I'll be leaving.” Lydia gave a small curtsy then left the gazebo.

Naturally, the doctor Lydia was thinking of was Francis. They found him in his room and explained the situation to him. Going to Aeris's room, they found a woman lying on her bed. Lydia recognised her. It was the other lady who'd visited Aeris's room the previous day.

Francis approached the woman who lay moaning weakly. “This is bad,” he muttered.

She wasn't sick, but her back was red and blistered. It looked like burns. Lydia could only think that she must have had boiling water poured on her.

Most likely it stung when Francis applied a salve and bandages as she started to struggle against them. Lydia helped to hold her still, but she fought so hard that Lydia couldn't avoid using a lot of force. Lydia paid no attention to her hem or sleeves as she climbed onto the bed, so she didn't realise Aeris saw her bruises.

Eventually, the injured lady seemed to run out of energy to fight and lay there muttering deliriously. Apparently, she was asking for shelter.

Aeris nodded firmly. “Why must women enter into an unwanted marriage, even though they're treated this badly?” Perhaps Aeris muttered things that way because she too had been treated in a similar manner by her husband?

“She'll probably have a fever later. If it seems very high, have her take this.”

Aeris accepted the medication from Francis then looked alternately between him and Lydia. “You will keep quiet about this, won't you?”

Most likely the maids that came and went from the room were Aeris's servants. The quietly changed the sheets with fresh new ones, and lay the woman on her stomach.

“Any way you think about it, it's impossible to continue hiding the injured here. This isn't your residence but a public hotel,” Francis said.

“It's alright. It's very soon.”

What's she talking about when she says it'll be very soon?

Lydia caught sight of the window sill in the corner of her eye. There was a glass of milk there. Were the lady with the burns, Mrs. Slope, and Aeris all the same—women who'd ended up in unwanted marriages? And was there anything significant in that? But Lydia couldn't see Aeris being the same as the

other two ladies. She was staying there on her own and firmly denied any unfounded rumours. Instead, she seemed more like she was trying to help women who were in trouble.

'If it were me, I would set her free.'

That's what she said. Things seemed like they were close to coming together in Lydia's mind.

“Well, I'll be going. Mrs. Lydia, I'll see you to your room.”

But when Francis spoke to her interrupting her, the feeling of being on the verge of realising something disappeared. Lydia climbed to her feet.

“I didn't know you'd become a doctor,” Aeris said to Francis as they stood by the door, and Lydia couldn't help being surprised at the comment.

Francis said nothing as he started walking, but Lydia couldn't help asking him about it.

“You know one another?”

Francis sighed softly and smiled self-deprecatingly.

“A little, in the past. But she didn't like me.Aeris knew Diana, and she didn't think I was good enough for Diana. She even said that directly to me.”

“I'm sorry.....I didn't know that. I put you in an awkward situation, didn't I?”

“No. It has nothing to do with the lady who was injured, not to mention that this is what I do. Most likely, Aeris doesn't care about it after all this time. Not to mention, Diana rejected me.”

“But I don't think outsiders can know whether a person is worthy or not.”

“Yeah, but I think I now understand what Aeris was trying to say. That's right..... I was trying to the mission that Diana considered more important than anything else away from her. Back then, I was wanting her to be mine alone. And that's why she left me.”

“I wonder what her mission was for it to have been that important.”

“Yeah, I wonder what it was.”

Francis stared into space sadly.

Lydia couldn't help wondering if Edgar shouldn't try joining forces with Francis. Even though they both had virtually no information about Faerie, if they shared what little information they had, they might be able to figure something out. She glanced towards the garden lost in thought.

She caught sight of the ladies who'd gathered at the gazebo as they were about to return to the hotel. Realising that the tea party must have ended, she remembered that she left her bag behind. Lydia stopped. “Mr. Francis, I seem to have forgotten something at the gazebo. I'll go get it.”

Francis offered to accompany her, but she declined. She didn't want him to see the other ladies looking down on her should they run into Lady Newman and her hangers-on. Most likely, they would no longer accept Lydia among them. She went to the garden alone and headed towards the gazebo. Lydia hesitated when she realised several people were still there and hid among the bushes.

“Still, I must admit to being surprised. That Lady Ashenbert.....”

“I thought she seemed to have a bit of a commoner's feel to her,” Lady Newman said.

“Just because us English folk living abroad aren't up on the latest details of what's happening back home, I feel like she's made fools of us, don't you?”

Lydia felt hurt at that comment.

“That's going too far. Regardless of her roots, she is a countess.”

Lady Newman's comment standing up for Lydia made her feel slightly better.

“My, whose bag is this?”

Apparently, one of the ladies noticed Lydia's handbag that she'd left on one of the chairs.

“Lady Ashenbert must have forgotten it.”

“It's quite cheap, isn't it? You wouldn't think it belonged to a countess.”

To Lydia, her handbag, while well-used, was anything but cheap. Still, she wondered if she should have bought a new one, after all. Hearing the ladies laughter, she couldn't help feeling depressed.

“I'll see that it's delivered to her.” Lady Newman took the bag.

Lydia couldn't help hoping that perhaps Lady Newman didn't hate her as she'd thought.

“Still, Lord Ashenbert's quite young and very striking, isn't he? The family has a noble lineage, so he should have had no troubles finding a high-born lady to marry.”

“True. It could be that he's quite eccentric.”

“Unlike young ladies of the aristocracy, it's much easier to get girls of common birth to do as they're told, and there are many men out there who like that.”

“It would be like taking a prostitute. As long as they get money, they'll do whatever you want.”

As the ladies left the gazebo, their gossip depressed Lydia more and more. Lady Newman stood a little apart from the others and was the last to leave. She'd shown no signs of taking part in the gossip, but suddenly she threw

Lydia's bag into the pond then left acting as though nothing had happened.

Eh.....? Why? Lydia stood shocked for a long moment unable to move.

Ah, she wasn't really standing up for me, after all.

Lady Newman felt that having Lydia, whom she'd fussed over and accepted among her friends, become the subject of ridicule was also an embarrassment for her. And that's why she not only stood up for Lydia but was also unable to laugh at her.

Lydia tiredly leaned against a nearby tree. Thinking about London society, Lydia had been safe from such things thanks to Edgar's preparations. She had the Duchess of Maysfield's backing and even gained the authorisation of Her Majesty the Queen. That's why her engagement to Edgar was accepted. But simply trying a little when she left that area wouldn't make her an aristocrat.

Still, she was a fairy doctor. She could do things that no one else could for Edgar's sake. She should be able to become invaluable to him. She rubbed her eyes hard trying not to cry, turned her back to the now empty gazebo, and finally managed to walk away.

*

"We're here on our honeymoon. There's no need for her to go out to a ladies-only tea party, is there, Raven?" Edgar grumbled as he put his chin in his hand.

Raven placed a teacup on the table and answered calmly, "Perhaps you should tell her that."

"If I say something about too much, she'll think I'm an annoying husband. It already seems like she's thinking about things dealing with marriage after being faced with a wife being abused."

He thought Raven sighed. After fighting in the middle of the night and then making up, now he was having to listen to Edgar's complaints. No doubt, he was feeling like he wasn't getting any chance to relax on this trip.

"But Raven, I wonder if Lydia's getting along with and enjoying spending time with Lady Newman and the others. If so, that would be fine, but I'm worried that she might be trying her best to get used to interacting with the nobility."

He was hoping that Lydia would find their stay at that hotel to be enjoyable. Edgar had taken Lydia to the salon thinking that Lydia would be able to relax as she made friends with English nobility who were used to dealing with foreigners, but it could be that Lydia took it as being part of her duty as Countess.

"Mrs. Lydia always tries her best at everything."

"About that..." If it was for Edgar's sake or for the Blue Knight Earl's household, she tried her hardest, but he couldn't help feeling that their honeymoon was being left by the wayside. "I wonder why she isn't more eager to deepen our relationship."

"On that front, I think it would be difficult to become more eager than you, my lord."

'I see,' Edgar thought.

He'd thought that if she agreed to marry, he didn't want anything else. He thought he would be content if they married. If she would say one word about loving him. If she would seek a kiss. Regardless how much Lydia gave him what he wanted, no doubt he would wish for more still.

"Raven, even though I'm happy, and yet I'm not entirely satisfied. I wonder why that is."

He felt like the traveller that walked through an arid desert suddenly being overcome by unquenchable thirst when he finally found water.

"I wonder if I can really bring Lydia happiness."

There were so many burdens that he carried. He didn't know if he would be able to give her a peaceful life where they could live happily growing old together. Even though he wanted to do that, there was a part of him that sometimes wished he would vanish in an instant while holding Lydia. If she truly became his, he didn't really care about the earl's household or the prince. He felt like abandoning thinking about such things or fighting, and rather than death, he felt like dragging her with him into oblivion.

Ever since meeting Lydia, he was supposed to have found hope, so he couldn't help feeling disconcerted to find such impulses that seemed more akin to despair still hiding within him.

"Regardless what happens, Mrs. Lydia will always stay with you," Raven said firmly.

That's what made him so afraid Edgar thought as he smiled wryly.

If that was true for Lydia, he felt that he was many times more earnest in his unwillingness to let her go. Even if she were to want to leave him, no doubt he would think of ways to keep her by his side. So there was one thing he was absolutely determined on. If the prince's memories he carried inside him should start to become active, if he should sense that, he would take action before it became too late. Except for that, he was determined that it would be impossible for him to leave her. There was nothing else for him to worry about. As long as he continued to be himself, he should have no doubts and concentrate on building a happy family with Lydia.

So why is it things were so painful sometimes. Why did he wonder if it really was okay to do that. The more Lydia loved him, he couldn't help wondering if it was really okay for him to be the way he was.

'You should never have been born.'

Perhaps it was because he remembered those words that resembled a curse.

".....Rather than that, Raven, tell me what you discovered," Edgar said trying to change gears.

Raven was looking at him oddly, and making him feel uneasy was pointless.

"Yes," Raven said. He looked like he wanted to say more, but he straightened up instead as he followed Edgar's request.

"The lady in question is Aeris d'Armor; she's staying at this hotel alone. Apparently, she visits numerous time each year."

"She seems to be quite well-off, but what about her background?"

"There are numerous rumours about her including that she has an elderly husband or that she's single, but they're all rumours and I haven't been able to learn anything definite."

"Huh. But because she's a regular guest of the hotel, she's become acquainted with the other guests, eh."

It seemed like Francis, too, had stayed here before. So it's possible that they were acquainted. But more than that, what bothered Edgar was whether she'd come to Sylvanford in the past. But if her background was unknown, it was difficult to tell if he could link her to his mother or not.

He wondered if he should meet directly with her or not. As he was wondering that, Kelly showed up.

"Master, the lady Aeris d'Armor has come."

Edgar and Raven exchanged glances in surprise.

Edgar looked towards Kelly. "And the reason for her visit?"

"Apparently, she wishes to see Mrs. Lydia and is asking if it would be alright for her to wait here."

"For now, show her here."

The person who appeared was none other than the woman who'd spoken to Francis the day before. And the ominous black almond-shaped eyes Edgar remembered so well were turned towards him. The strange feeling that she looked the exact same as she had in the past grew.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Lord Ashenbert." Her smile looked as though it was plastered on.

"I take it you became acquainted with my wife here?"

"Yes, she's most compassionate and a wonderful wife."

"And the reason for your visit?"

"Are you the sort of husband who wants to know everything that your wife has been up to?" Her sharp manner of speech was clearly meant as a challenge. Perhaps she knows who Edgar is. No, that probably wasn't the case. Even if she were the woman who appeared at Sylvanford back then, there was no way for her to know that the boy from back then was currently calling himself Earl Ashenbert. But her look gave the unpleasant impression that she saw through all the lies. Edgar frowned.

"I didn't think you would mind if I asked. Rest assured, if it has something to do with a secret of yours, it's unlikely my wife would say anything about it to me."

"No, it's not about me. I was concerned for your wife's injuries."

"Injuries?" Edgar asked blankly.

"Are you unaware of them? There are bruises on her arms and legs as though she'd been beaten or struck with something..."

"Surely not."

"How strange. If someone had done that to her, I wonder why she wouldn't say anything about it."

Mrs. d'Armor smiled thinly.

"I would ask that you not tell such tales. Lydia's not the sort of wife to keep secrets."

"Yes, no doubt. In which case, I wonder if you're merely pretending to be ignorant therefore."

Just what did she hope to accomplish.

Her attitude made it clear that she wouldn't accept being refuted. She then bent her knee into a proper curtsy. "I've offended you. I'll be leaving and will come again later."

She immediately left the room.

Edgar remained there standing in shock. He buried his fingers in his hair and called Lydia's lady's maid. "Kelly!"

"Yes, master."

"Are there bruises on Lydia's body as though she'd been hit?" he demanded almost snapping at her.

Kelly looked up at Edgar looking tense, but she answered firmly, "What are you talking about? There are no such things on her."

Edgar wondered if that was the truth. A good lady's maid was a wife's unconditional ally. And Edgar chose that sort of lady's maid for Lydia. He couldn't help feeling a bit like he'd hanged his own neck.

"Very well. You may go."

After he dismissed her, Raven drew closer with a serious look on his face.

"Raven, the woman just now was suggesting that I struck Lydia. What do you think?"

Edgar threw himself onto the chair exhausted from a mix of anger and disbelief.

"My lord, there's one more important piece of information," Raven said without giving his opinion.

Which meant it dealt with that woman.

"Alright, let's hear it."

"Actually, the name madame d'Armor has come up elsewhere. Mr. Slade's report regarding the red moonstone painting arrived from London this morning. It's also the name of the person who claimed the painting stating they'd had no intention of selling it in the first place."

The picture of the woman wearing a red moonstone ring. Her face was hidden behind a mask. In the background was the image of a rose-coloured old castle floating on the sea. And that picture led Edgar and the others to Bretagne.

It was a mistake for the French art dealer to have brought that painting to London in the first place. But if the painting's owner were staying in the same hotel? What did that mean? It was almost as though she'd lured them there.

"Also, the model for the painting is Madame d'Armor herself. It's also written that she's the owner of the small island shown in the background. While there are many islands in this area with old castles, I'm in the process of going through them one-by-one."

Could that person be in possession of the red moonstone that might be the property of the earl's house?

"Do you think Madame d'Armor and Aeris d'Armor who is staying here in this hotel are the same person?" Edgar asked leaning forward.

"It's a definite possibility. Madame d'Armor's background is also unknown, but she's wealthy enough to do as she pleases."

"I see. So they're both mysterious women with hidden pasts."

The woman in Edgar's memory. The owner of and model for the painting of a woman wearing the red moonstone ring. She'd been staying here in this hotel almost as though she'd been waiting for them, and at some point, became acquainted with Lydia. Any way he considered things, she was definitely up to something.

"Master, the missus has returned."

Edgar cut off what he was thinking about at the sound of Kelly's voice. Seeing Lydia enter the room, he couldn't help thinking she looked a little depressed. Worried about Lydia and the way she seemed, Edgar quickly decided to set the issues of Aeris and the possibility that Lydia might have bruises from having been struck aside for the moment. He got up to greet her.

"Welcome back, Lydia. How was the tea party?"

Even if he spread his arms for her, Lydia almost never jump into his arms, so he embraced her. Since she kept her face down, he settled for kissing her on the forehead instead.

"Yes.Actually, Edgar, there's something I have to apologise to you about."

"Did something happen?" While he was worried as to what might have happened, he kept his voice light trying to keep things from becoming serious.

"I told everyone that I'm not of noble birth."

Edgar felt relieved. For the most part, the things Lydia worried about weren't very important.

"Oh, is that all."

"Is that all'... They might think you're not a proper aristocrat for having married a commoner."

"Let them think what they want. An aristocrat's true worth isn't their social position or their lineage, but their personal pride. They don't have any proper pride, and that's why they're particular about that sort of thing."

Edgar regretted taking Lydia to the salon when he saw the hurt look on Lydia's face. Apparently, socialising while travelling didn't result in fun memories.

"Please cheer up. I have a present for you." He smiled as though to say it was nothing major and stroked Lydia's hair. He then picked up the box that was sitting on the table and handed it to her.

"It just arrived from the shop in Paris. Go ahead and open it."

Lydia looked at it curiously and nodded before undoing the ribbon. Inside was a handbag with white butterfly-shell beads. When they'd been out shopping in Paris, Lydia seemed to really like it. While she'd considered it, she ended up not buying it. She hadn't realised that Edgar secretly bought it.

"This..... Why? It was so expensive." Lydia looked at him surprised.

"I thought it really did suit you. I know you don't care for luxuries. So this will only happen while we're on this trip. If I can buy it, I want to give you everything you want."

"I see, you..... Um..... thank you. It's lovely." Lydia said with a smile, but she didn't seem truly happy.

Perhaps she was simply taken aback because of the price.

However, Lydia then something completely unexpected. "I was just thinking I should have bought it back then. Because I'd ended up doing something as embarrassing as not buying something at such an expensive shop."

"Lydia, what are you talking about?"

"The maids at the hotel in Paris were incredulous as they talked about it. I'm sorry, I didn't realise it."

While he didn't intend it, he might have hurt Lydia's pride with his gift. At the very least, the timing of his gift might not have been the best given how she'd only just had problems with the other ladies over social class.

"Um, that's not what I intended. I just wanted to make you happy."

"I'm really happy about it." Since she was forcing herself to smile, it didn't

look that way in the least.

"I'll be able to look more like a countess with this bag."

"The embroidered bag you usually use suits you very well, too. You can use it with the dresses it matches with."

Edgar heard that Lydia's deceased grandmother had bought it for her to use when she became of age. While it was quite simple for a lady of the nobility, if she'd imagined her granddaughter marrying a successful man of the same class, it was something that would be appropriate to bring with her to her new home. So to Lydia, it was extremely valuable and on par with any luxury item.

Edgar liked how Lydia carefully used the things she valued so much. Not to mention, the Ashenbert household wasn't a noble family where they would not appear to be nobility if they didn't take care to keep up appearances. Not once has Edgar ever felt embarrassed by Lydia's belongings or her actions. He wondered how to try and explain that to her.

"It's okay. I won't use that anymore," Lydia stated flatly, but tears filled her eyes.

"Why?" Edgar asked noticing that Lydia didn't have that bag with her. She should have had it with her when she went out. "By the way, where is it?"

"I dropped it in the pond..... So..." Lydia said faintly.

Edgar realised what had happened. 'Ahh, I should have concentrated on spending time together with Lydia and not bothered with such unnecessary

things, after all. What am I doing? We've only just married. Leaving London, the company is different and unfamiliar. It's not possible for Lydia to suddenly be a countess, so it was up to me to stay with her and protect her.'

Edgar still didn't know about the bruises Lydia may be hiding. Caught up in his own thoughts, he took Lydia's hand. He then turned and quickly left the room.

".....Edgar, where are we going?" Lydia asked at a complete loss. He'd taken her out of the room and down the stairs. Going from the hall to the garden, he headed directly for the gazebo.

"About where did you drop the bag?"

"Somewhere over there, but there are many weeds so it'll be difficult to find."

He let go of Lydia's hand, and just as she realised that he'd taken off his gloves and rolled up his sleeves, he suddenly stepped into the pond.

"Eh, Edgar!"

It was a shallow man-made pond, and Edgar ignored how his shoes and pants became wet as he went further in. Making his way through the reeds and cattails, he felt along the bottom of the murky pond with both hands.

"Edgar, come back. It's okay, already."

"Don't worry. I'm sure I'll find it."

Lydia could only stare after him as she stood shocked on the shore.

"Please, stop it! I'm really happy with your gift. But because I'd been so depressed..... Did I seem like I didn't want it? I didn't mean it that way!" Lydia stepped into the pond unable to contain herself.

"I'm sorry..... I really did want it, but before I could realise how happy I was I could only feel surprised and wonder if it would really suit me. I'm sorry, I was so reserved." She almost slipped on the mud at the bottom of the pond as she struggled to get to where he was. "So I'll try to become more suited to it. And more the way you want me to be.....!"

"Found it!" Edgar exclaimed when he found the bag caught in the roots of the reeds. "See, I found it," he said as he turned towards Lydia.

The words caught in his throat and he looked shocked. "Lydia..... of all things. Ah, your dress is all muddy."

"You're the same way."

Lydia felt relieved and smiled when she saw Edgar break into an amused smile.

"They're both your handbags. That works doesn't it? You're the simple girl of the Carltons and the countess of the Ashenberts. They're both you. I'm not wishing for only one part and not the other."

Lydia nodded as she accepted the embroidered handbag. While it was stained from the murky water, it was even more precious now for his having found it

for her.

"Thank you, Edgar."

She looked up into his eyes, and he held her tightly.

"Maybe you won't get angry if I tell you now."

"What?"

"Actually, I bought the hat, stole, and gloves, too. Everything that you'd hesitated over but gave up on buying. They should all have arrived by the time we return to London."

Lydia couldn't help looking exasperated.

Edgar looked at her uncertainly. "I know. If I want to make you happy, it won't be through gifts like these. Rather than the rose raised in the greenhouse, you prefer the primrose found by the roadside. For Christmas, a heartfelt card. But I can't help wanting to give you all sorts of things. Because I want to see you looking happy every day."

Lydia held his chilled hand in both her. "Your hand's cold."

Edgar smiled and gripped her hand. He then pulled her to him and kissed her. It was light, just a brushing of the lips. But he seemed like he wanted more and kissed her repeatedly. And the kisses became deeper and more passionate.

"Um, Edgar....."

Her hair started to come undone. Lydia gasped when he nibbled at her.

"Aren't your feet cold?"

".....Yeah," he said and let her go, but he seemed rather unsatisfied. "Sorry, let's go back."

They couldn't simply stay in the middle of the pond like that, so they had no choice. But seeing Edgar looking like he wasn't content made Lydia uncertain. She wondered if Edgar wasn't happy. He still had a variety of issues to face and his situation wasn't so simple that he would be happy just because he got married. Even so, he always accepted her wholly and made her feel safe. He helped her realise that her worries and fears were but the slightest of things. But if she couldn't simply express her pleasure upon receiving a gift, it was only natural that Edgar too wouldn't be content. She wondered what she should do. Perhaps it would have been better not to shy away and to simply accept being kissed.

Next time. Even though she thought that now, when next time came, Lydia still couldn't be more accepting.

But I'm a fairy doctor, so I should be able to become a necessary support for him. Even though she tried to take comfort in that thought, she was only becoming more and more insecure.

Having taken off the muddy dress, Lydia was warmed her feet by the fireplace when Edgar entered the dressing room. Flustered, Lydia couldn't help gripping

the front of her dressing gown closed. Even though she realised doing so with her husband was unnatural, her entire body became tense. She was only wearing a chemise and her corset under the gown. She still had ugly bruises on her shoulders and back.

Even though the sun had begun to set, it would still be some time before the room was engulfed in darkness. Lydia felt as though the kiss they'd shared still smouldered within her, and the feeling only became more inflamed when she saw Edgar's face. Since she felt that way, it was possible that he shared that feeling.

What if he wants to continue from where we left off.

If he wanted her, she wanted to comply. However, despite her determination, a part of her still couldn't help hesitating.

Realising Lydia's feelings, Kelly gently tried to get Edgar to leave only to have him tell her to leave the room. Kelly had no choice but to do as she was told.

When it was only the two of them, Edgar drew closer to Lydia and twined the lock of hair that fell on her shoulder through his fingers. Edgar himself had completely changed his clothes, but because he wasn't wearing a necktie or his gloves, his appearance was a little more casual.

"I was wondering if we could talk."

".....Yes."

Talk... I wonder what about.

"Lydia, is there anything you want to talk to me about?"

"Eh? Wh-why?"

"For example..... a problem that's difficult to talk about."

"There's nothing like that."

She couldn't ask if he wasn't content with married life. Lydia got up from her chair and tried to put a little more distance between them in order to calm herself down.

"Why do you ask that all of a sudden? I'll admit I was derided over my social class, but it's not a problem. You said that it was okay for me to be the way I am, so I'm okay now."

He suddenly embraced her from behind.

"I see.If that's the case, that's fine," he murmured, but he sounded like he didn't believe her at all.

Lydia blushed at the feel of his breath on the back of her neck. Because her attention was caught by his fingers as they traced her collarbone, she didn't notice when he undid the belt to her gown, so she was startled when he took it off her.

Her gown fell to her feet and dressed only in her underwear, Lydia's back and

arms were clearly exposed. The ugly signs of bleeding beneath her white skin was in plain view.

She sensed Edgar's breath catch.

"Umthiswell"

She quickly turned but his look was so anguished that she was unable to give any excuse. Anger flashed across his face. He let go of Lydia and silently left the room.

'I wonder if it's that unsightly.' Lydia stood there shocked. '.....Well, it's only natural. After all, I can barely stand to look at them myself. But he didn't have to get that angry. They'll disappear over time. But perhaps, for men, if they become disappointed in a woman once, maybe they no longer see her as being attractive. Not to mention I've never been that attractive. That's why I didn't want him to see any more than necessary.'

Depressed, Lydia heard the sound of thunder in the distance.

'Ah, I wonder if there's going to be another shower.' The sky had suddenly turned dark and flashes could occasionally be seen among the clouds. Lydia moved to close the window when she noticed that the distant sea seemed to shine a myriad of colours.

Lydia went out onto the balcony. She didn't like thunder. And even though it was rumbling, she was entranced by the strange yet beautiful surface of the sea. She walked to the railing and she heard gentle singing coming from out of nowhere.

The blissful sound was bewitching and beckoned her. Lydia realised she was leaning over the railing. It almost felt as though if she continued, she could fly. A part of her realised that something was strange. There was magic in that song.

This... a mermaid's singing.

They seduce people dragging them into the sea and drown them.

'I mustn't listen.' Despite what she thought, her body wouldn't listen to her and feeling almost as though she were empty, she tried to climb over the railing.

"Lydia! What are you doing!"

She heard Nico's voice and felt a tug on the sleeve of her gown. But he was weak and couldn't stop her from trying to jump from the balcony.

"Nico..... help me. The mermaid's song..."

"Eh? I don't hear anything!"

Perhaps the magic was aimed only at Lydia. Why were the mermaids trying to kill her? Nico buried his claws into Lydia's sleeve and tried to call for help, but if magic was involved, most likely Edgar and the others in the next room wouldn't be able to hear them.

"Nico, if I fall from here, without doubt, I'll die."

"If that's the case, then get back in the room!"

"I can't. I'm caught in their magic..... So Nico, open a path to the fae realm."

"Ehh?! You expect me to fall with you?!"

"Please, jumping into Faerie's the only option."

Lydia could no longer support herself. Just as she realised she was listing, she fell. She no longer felt any resistance on the sleeve Nico had been pulling on, but she didn't know if that was because he'd let go of her or because he'd fallen with her. She didn't have the chance to find out. Just when she thought she felt herself hit the cold surface of the water, salty water rushed down her throat.

Chapter 4: Paradise for Eve

"I'm very sorry, master." Kelly's braids almost reached the floor as she hung her head.

"That's enough. I understand."

Surprised to discover bruises on Lydia's body, Edgar demanded an explanation. And Kelly finally admitted the truth. Since Edgar saw them with his own eyes, there was no point in trying to hide things any more.

"Mrs. Lydia didn't want to worry you. That's all."

No doubt. But Edgar was angry unable to forgive himself for not knowing what had happened to Lydia.

"So please, don't be angry with the missus."

"Of course I won't be."

He had absolutely no intention of taking Lydia to task. While he wanted to beat the man to a pulp, unfortunately, he was currently on the run. Rather, he was worried that Lydia might have been taken aback by Edgar's attitude moments earlier. He couldn't help wondering about that once he started

thinking about it. He should have waited until Lydia was willing to tell to him about it, but instead he forcibly exposed the injuries. And on top of that, he left her there without saying a single kind word. He'd been unnerved by what he discovered. The idea that someone might have struck Lydia and that he hadn't known about it was more than enough to rob him of any clear thought.

".....Kelly, would you look in on Lydia. Um, if she's in a bad mood, try to talk her around. I know, we can try going to the theatre in town tonight. After that... in any case, we'll go somewhere Lydia's likely to enjoy."

"I heard from Mr. Nico that Mrs. Lydia seemed interested in galettes," Raven offered.

Edgar jumped on his suggestion. "That's it. We'll have Bretagne's local cuisine at an simple cafe. That's not bad, right, Kelly?"

"Understood, I'll speak to her about it."

Kelly curtsied and headed for Lydia's dressing room.

As long as she agreed to going out, most likely he'd be able to win his way back into her good graces after that.

Edgar felt relieved.

"My lord, are galettes a dish?" Raven asked cocking his head to one side.

"Eh? I think so, aren't they?"

"I heard that Mrs. Lydia wanted to see galettes flying through the air."

.....Most likely, Lydia was mistaken as to what they are. He wanted to think that. But if she saw galettes, the dish, perhaps she'd be confused thinking that wasn't what she was thinking of. As Edgar fretted over the possibility, Kelly came rushing back into the room.

"Master!Mrs. Lydia is nowhere to be found!"

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Lydia woke to find herself in an unfamiliar room. The sound of the wind and rain continued incessantly. The small window in the room almost seemed to creak, and there was only a bed and chest in the cozy room. While the lamp was lit, there was no fireplace, so the room was chilly for her in only her underwear and dressing gown. She wrapped the blanket around her shoulders and stood.

"I'm..... alive."

Her clothes weren't wet. Which meant that she hadn't fallen into the real sea and perhaps Nico opened the path to Faerie and she fell into the fae realm. However, she thought that most likely she was in the human realm. Nothing about the building seemed unusual. She opened the door a little. While the corridor seemed rather narrow, it was lit. Apparently, she wasn't being locked in.

Still, where did Nico go.

"Oy, Lydia." Along with the sound of the voice, a small hand rapped on the window.

Surprised, Lydia ran over to the window.

"Nico! Is that you, Nico?"

"Hurry up and open the window, will you?"

She unlatched the window, and the grey fae cat jumped into the room. Lydia smiled slightly in relief.

"My, you're completely soaked."

"Sheesh, it's really coming down," he said. He shook himself much like any cat, but after that, he stood up on two legs and straightened his coat, whiskers, and tie with both hands.

"Nico, how did I get here? Do you know where this place is?"

"I ended up letting go of you and thought you were done for when you fell."

"Eh?! Nico! You mean you didn't save me? Letting go of me! You're heartless!"

Nico didn't bother looking contrite and just shrugged coolly. "Well, it doesn't matter, right? You're alive, after all."

Lydia looked down at Nico in disbelief, but decided to simply agree with him.

"In that case, I wonder why I'm alive."

"The mermaids opened the way to Faerie. Then they carried you all the way to this island."

"Mermaids? You mean they weren't trying to kill me?"

"So it seems. And I ended up getting swallowed by the path you fell into and got washed up on this island here."

"It's an island?"

"It's a small island. There's a lone castle built at the top of the crag, and I finally managed to find you."

'I wonder how far away I am from the pink granite coast. From where Edgar is. The sun's completely set, so quite some time must have passed.' At that thought, Lydia couldn't help feeling both panicked and annoyed.

If it's an island, Nico too, couldn't get back now. Even in Faerie, the island would be surrounded by the sea, so she needed to get help from the fae of the sea. Either that or the only others that could come and go freely from there would be one that could fly. Since she couldn't return soon, Lydia decided the best thing to do was to take care of what she could do where she was.

Nico's comment that there was a castle on the island reminded Lydia of the small island in the painting. Since she'd been carried there by mermaid's, it seemed even more likely that the island was important. In any case, Lydia felt that she wanted to know what the mermaids intentions were. Also, it was possible that the mermaids of Bretagne might know something about Ibrazel or the red moonstone. The Blue Knight Earl has almost been close to the merrow. And while the merrow of Ireland and the mermaids of Bretagne weren't the identical, they were both mer-folk and likely to be closely related.

"That's it, Nico, were there any fae among the corrigan that seemed like they might know about Ibrazel?"

Nico sat on the edge of the bed and shook his head. "Those guys are really forgetful. They don't remember things from one month ago very well even. They were just saying that they know everything about the princess at the bottom of the sea."

Supposedly, it was the princess's fault that the royal capital where Bretagne was ruled from sank into the sea long ago. And legend has it that the princess still lives at the bottom of the sea.

"I wonder if it might be possible for me to meet that princess."

"Supposedly, no one's ever met her. Or maybe no one remembers having done so."

Perhaps the mermaids know where the princess's capital city is.

As Lydia considered that, she heard footsteps approaching the room.

"Someone's coming, Nico."

Nico quickly hid himself under the bed when the door opened.

"You're awake." A black haired woman commented.

".....Aeris," Lydia murmured her name surprised.

"I found you laying on the shore of this island."

Aeris entered the room and handed Lydia what appeared to be a change of clothes.

"Why are you here? Weren't you at the hotel?"

"I checked out at sunset. At the time, I'd heard that you'd fallen from the balcony."

"Eh, is that what they're saying?!"

Since she'd suddenly vanished, she wasn't surprised to hear that it had caused quite a commotion. It was also possible that someone might have seen her leaning over the balcony's edge. Lydia panicked. "Um, did Edgar..... Lord Ashenbert think I fell? Do you know how he was?"

"Are you worried about the man who hurt you?"

"Hurt me?"

"You were seeking help and hoping to be able to come to women's paradise, right?" Aeris continued speaking calmly. "A glass of milk left on the windowsill—that's the sign of wanting help. You'd done the same thing, right?"

It wasn't a sign for ladies caught in an unwanted marriage to be able to identify one another, but a sign of wanting help. Lydia desperately tried to get her thoughts in order. ".....W-wait a moment. Do you mean that by leaving a glass, a lady can leave her husband and enter women's paradise?"

"That's right."

"And this... is paradise?"

"This island is mine. It's my wish to save as many suffering women as I can."

"Um, if this is women's paradise....."

"There's no need to obey men or fear them here. The lady who'd been burned will be able to relax and heal here. To be honest, I also intended to bring Mrs. Slope here, but....." She looked away in regret.

Rather than at the bottom of the sea, the paradise was at the castle on the small island. Lydia looked around the room in disbelief and wondered how many such rooms there were, and how many women lived there. The castle did seem to be quite large. Lydia had the vague feeling she finally had the full

picture of what had happened.

The rumours of female guests staying at the hotel vanishing was most likely because Aeris whisked them away so that their families couldn't find them. Most likely, the women learned from somewhere that if they went to that hotel and sent the signal, they knew they would be saved. Men didn't know about it. It was a secret exchange only between women, and Lydia ended get caught up in it. After all, she'd only been leaving milk out for the fae.

"There's no need to worry. This place is safe. This island is reachable from land only once a year. When the sea level falls to its lowest level when the tide is out. Following the path that's normally underwater, we've finally been able to come here tonight. Come morning, the path will have disappeared, and with no signs that a boat was used, no one will realise that the women have all fled to this island. While there are a number of men who get worked up over having their woman get away from them, and try to search for them for their own pride's sake, none of them have ever made it here."

Since she'd been waiting for the time when the path was open, probably that's why things 'hadn't been in time' for Mrs. Slope.

"If you want to eat, please come down to the dining room on the first floor after you've gotten changed."

Aeris started to leave the room, but Lydia quickly stopped her.

"Wait, this is all a mistake. I haven't been hurt by him. I left the milk on the windowsill for a different reason..... I have to get back right away."

Aeris turned back slightly and looked at Lydia pityingly. "You're free now. There's no need to be victim to a man."

"I'm not a victim. Edgar loves me....."

"Love? Do you truly believe that? Even though you have all those bruises on your body?"

Shocked, Lydia hugged herself as though trying to protect herself. 'They're so ugly that anyone who saw them would likely no longer love me,' she thought not realising that Aeris mistakenly thought that Edgar had done that to her. In which case, it was possible that he wasn't even searching for Lydia now that she's disappeared. 'No, that's not likely. I believe in him. But.....'

"Don't look like that. You came here because you were meant to come."

I was meant to come?

"Aeris..... don't you think it strange? My clothes aren't even wet, so how did I manage to come here without a boat....."

"Strange things happen here in Bretagne. But since you're here, you're under the princess's protection. There's no going back." Aeris stated firmly.

Lydia stood there shocked as Aeris left the room.

'What did she mean princess?' Lydia thought frantically. 'By that, did she mean from that legend? The princess that's supposed to have built a paradise

for women in the city at the bottom of the sea.'

"Lydia, are you alright?" Nico asked worried when she staggered over and sat down.

"Nico..... it seems things are very serious."

Nico still crouched underneath the bed.

"Things are more serious for me. I didn't expect this place to be the domain of the half-fae princess that hates men! If that's the case, they'll kill me if they find me!"

"I think..... most likely it'll be alright. After all, it's an old castle, so they must have cats in order to get rid of the mice. There are probably male cats here as well."

"I'm not a cat!"

"Umm, Nico, what I meant is that the princess hates human men. I doubt she'd kill fae gentlemen." Lydia hurriedly corrected herself.

Nico slowly peered out from under the bed.

"I see. Well, that's probably true. There's no way she wouldn't be taken with a refined and well-bred fairy like myself."

'If she likes cats,' Lydia thought, but she kept it to herself.

"Also, this is the human realm. I haven't been taken by the fae yet."

Although it's the domain of the princess of another realm, human reasoning should still pass here. And even if she didn't have the princess's permission, as long as she had a boat, it should be possible for her to escape.

But Lydia suddenly became afraid of going back. She couldn't help wondering how Edgar would react if she managed to escape.

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"Lord Ashenbert, the sun has now set, so we'll be ending the search at the base of the cliff," the manager came over and said. "We'll begin searching again when the sun rises, but the tide will have come in, and most likely....."

Whatever is at the bottom of the cliff at the moment will end up sinking to the bottom of the sea.

"Why..... are you only searching the bottom of the cliff? Lydia won't be there!" Edgar couldn't help raising his voice as he edged closer to the manager.

If they found her at the bottom of the cliff, there wouldn't be the slightest chance of hope. Edgar also couldn't believe that Lydia had fallen from the balcony, as one member of the hotel staff said. While it was true that a strip from her dressing gown had gotten caught on the railing, he couldn't believe that they wouldn't have heard anything even though they'd been in the next room.

A staff member acting like a detective suggested that either she'd jumped on her own, or the person claiming she hadn't made a sound had pushed her. However, he quickly fled after Edgar punched him.

The manager left after giving Edgar the update. Edgar didn't have the will to stop him and sat in the chair. He remembered the look on Lydia's face. The bruises on her that were so painful to see and her mixed expression of shame and dismay. He wanted her to always be smiling, so why did things end up backfiring on him. He couldn't bear the thought of losing her like this.

Swearing to make Lydia happy, hope had become a definite reality. So if this happiness were to come to an end, he thought it would only be if the prince's memories should ever take him over. It certainly wouldn't be now. It was impossible for him to lose her now.

"My lord, Mr. Nico's also missing. It's well past dinner time," Raven said upon returning.

Kelly continued praying to God.

Could Nico's disappearance have anything to do with Lydia? Edgar wasn't even sure if that gave him hope or not. Was it possible that Nico fell with her? For example, if he tried to save her.....

"What about Arrow?"

"I can't tell anything about the spirit of the sword."

Normally, even Edgar rarely saw that fairy. In the moonlight or in dreams, he could sometimes speak to him in places close to fae domains. In the human realm, when called Arrow appeared in the his sword form. And that had been more than enough for Edgar, but right now, regardless of how much he called, the sword didn't appear. Even though Arrow should be able to tell where Lydia's marriage ring was located.

"Useless."

".....Please forgive me."

"No, not you. I'm talking about Arrow."

Raven still hung his head, however. Most likely because, like Edgar, he was upset he hadn't realised something might have happened to Lydia and Nico. The other thing bothering Edgar was Aeris d'Armor. She'd left the hotel pretty much while the commotion was taking place. And he wondered if that too, might have something to do with Lydia's disappearance.

Edgar slowly got to his feet.

"I'm going out to search for Lydia."

Raven started to follow him, but Edgar stopped him.

"I'd like to be alone."

Leaving the hotel, he went down to the port town. While the rain had died

down quite a bit, there was virtually no one on the streets. Inquiring at the station, the station master told him in heavily accented French that he hadn't seen any English young ladies. Even though it was a resort area, the summer season was over. If he'd spotted any wealthy-looking foreigners headed towards the hotel or their vacation properties, he would have spoken to them in the hopes of earning a tip.

The same was true with the ships. The weather was bad today, so there were only a few passengers. The last ferry left before sunset, so there was no chance Lydia would have been on it. It could be that someone threatened Lydia or tricked her and stole her away. In which case, she was still be alive. But it could be that he only wished that to be true. There was no evidence that she'd been kidnapped.

Hoping to at least find Nico, he checked the back alleys where the cats seemed to gather, but it was no use. Perhaps it was only natural. After all, he was fae.

"I wonder if even a fairy would die if they fell from a cliff," Edgar murmured. His fully glass of cider felt unusually heavy.

The cafe near the pier was crowded and buzzing with conversation, but what he heard was all in unfamiliar Breton.

"Hmm, I wonder."

The person who said that spoke English. The man before him, resting his chin in his hand, was one-eyed and had his silvery hair tied back in a tail. Francis had spotted Edgar wandering around the port town and spoken to him. Perhaps he'd been unable to ignore Edgar, who'd been completely worn, so he

suggested they have something to eat at a cafe.

"So these are galettes? They look like rags."

They're made from buckwheat flour and thinly cooked. Well, try it. They go well with cider."

"I was supposed to have them with Lydia."

"Every time you open your mouth, it's "Lydia this", isn't it?"

"What else would I need to talk about?"

"Hmm, well, I guess it's okay."

"Lydia..... I wonder if she's crying all alone right now. She can't live without me."

"Isn't that the other way around?"

"I'm that way, so Lydia is too. Otherwise, she wouldn't have married me."

"Huh, and here I thought it was just you that was head over heels in love."

"Lydia's shy."

"I see... When it comes to being your wife, she must face a number of embarrassing situations."

"Sill, why am I telling you this sort of thing when I've only just met you?"

Francis laughed and took a drink of cider. "Maybe because we resemble one another? Just because a single woman disappeared, we're pathetically hopeless."

Edgar laughed too. He took a drink—the apple wine was surprisingly sweet. ".....No thanks. I really don't want to become like you."

"You're one to speak. But if you continue drinking the way you are, that's what's going to happen."

"You're quite right about that."

Now wasn't the time to be wandering aimlessly about town. He needed to think clearly about what was happening. Edgar shook his head trying to clear the fog from his brain, and pulled his thoughts together. His ash-mauve eyes were determined as he looked at Francis.

"I'm not going to let Lydia become a memory," he said.

Francis became serious at Edgar's statement. "Good. I can finally discuss things with you."

"Discuss matters?"

Francis nodded and leaned forward. "Edgar, this is the exact same as that time. The time with Diana. I'm sure Aeris must have taken her away."

"What did you say?"

Aeris d'Armor did?

"Why? For what purpose? And where?"

Edgar clenched his fist.

If she was the one who appeared in the past at Sylvanford, and if she happened to know his roots, her target should be Edgar. In which case, she should direct her hate or whatever it was at him. So, why did she go after Lydia?

"I don't understand very well either."

"Then why are you so sure?"

"There's no trace of Aeris after she left the hotel, right? From my own investigations, she didn't even had a carriage prepared for her. Nor has she been spotted in town at the station or at the port. The injured person I saw in Aeris's room left a note behind and has also disappeared. While no fuss was made about her disappearance, ultimately, it means that Aeris and the lady she'd met at the hotel both disappeared at the same time."

That's right. No one matching Lydia's description was seen at the station or at

the port. Since they said they hadn't seen any ladies that seemed likely to be staying at the hotel, it meant that Aeris and the other missing lady hadn't taken the train or a ship. Perhaps it was only natural to think that they'd all disappeared together.

"Francis, was your lady close to Aeris?"

He frowned and nodded. "Do you feel like listening to a story from my past?"

"It seems like it might make for a good diversion."

"In any case, I met Diana. It must have been fate."

Francis suddenly started telling the story from his past. Apparently, it happened before he decided to pursue medicine. Diana had been staying at the home of a wealthy Breton noble family and seemed to be the young daughter of a good home in the midst of learning to become a wife. But in fact, after becoming close with Francis, she admitted that she was from Ibrazel and that she was on a mission for the Blue Knight Earl's household. The nobleman Diana was staying with was apparently Aeris's husband. In other words, Diana had been staying at Aeris's residence.

"Wait a moment. Do you mean Aeris d'Armor is a member of Bretagne's aristocracy and that her residence is nearby?"

"At that time, her name wasn't d'Armor. I heard that shortly after Diana disappeared, her elderly husband passed away. And the residence ended up in the hands of other people. It was bought by an American, renovated, and it's now that hotel."

What was that? Edgar buried his fingers in his hair.

"If Aeris used to live there, that would mean she's extremely familiar with the building, the property it's on, and even the surrounding areas."

"That's right. It lends credibility to my theory that she's taking women away with no one the wiser, right?"

Francis then turned the topic back to Diana.

It seemed that Aeris knew where Diana was from and what her goals were. That's why she didn't think well of Francis. She'd felt that he wouldn't be of any assistance to Diana.

"Diana told me that she loved me. But because she had something she had to do, there was no way she could marry me."

Just before she left Bretagne, Francis tried to prevent her from leaving by drugging and kidnapping her. He'd heard that if she didn't leave when the chance came, she would be unable to leave for a year. So if he robbed her of her freedom for two to three days, he figured he'd have the chance to talk her into it.

"Did she get angry with you?"

"She did. She was extremely upset and said she completely misjudged me. At the same time, she looked at me almost in pity. Even so, I kept her locked up

and refused to listen to her pleas that I let her go."

"How cruel."

"Can you honestly say you wouldn't do the same thing? Could you let go of the person you love?"

Most likely he couldn't. But at the same time, Edgar was also prepared to have to let her go. He didn't think it right to drag Lydia into sharing the same fate as he whether she was willing or not. He hoped for her to be herself and that she would always be smiling. If he couldn't do that for her, then the time might one day come when he would have to leave. He'd come to realise that on the island in the highlands. If he was prepared for that possibility, he thought he would simply be able to love her.

"Didn't you think that by doing that, you would truly end up losing her?"

"I wasn't able to realise it at the time." Francis frowned and clenched his fingers as they rested on the table laced together. "In the end, Diana told me she forgave me," he said almost as though saying the words in prayer or in apology.

".....And after that, she...?"

"Disappeared. During the short time I'd taken my eyes off her. There were no signs she'd left using the door, and it was a sheer cliff below the open window..... The way things looked, I thought she must have committed suicide, and a part of me died that day."

The circumstances surrounding Lydia's disappearance definitely resembled those when Diana disappeared.

"But you're thinking that Diana hadn't committed suicide, but that Aeris had taken her away, aren't you?"

Naturally, there was no way Lydia wouldn't commit suicide either.

In any case, for me, the only thing that mattered was the fact that I lost her. And it was because I'd forced her into doing so. So I lived a debauched life and tried to forget everything. I applied to serve in the war, and ended up losing an eye. But as time passed, I finally started to be able to think about the meaning behind her forgiving me. I thought that, maybe, it would be okay for me to follow where she'd gone."

He drained his earthenware cup, and the server at the cafe automatically refilled it with more cider. It never went empty, just like fae cups.

"And that's why I tried to find out about you, Edgar, and why I came to Bretagne. Aeris was still quite cold towards me just like she was before, but if she'd taken Diana and the other ladies away, there's no doubt. She must have taken them to the women's paradise."

Edgar leaned forward as they finally reached the key point of their conversation.

"Paradise? Where is that?"

"The city at the bottom of the sea."

They suddenly went from the real world to another reality. It was an old legend told through the years in Bretagne which was surrounded by the sea. Lydia had been interested in it. He remembered that the princess hated men and had built a paradise at the bottom of the sea and only for women.

"You're the Earl of Ibrazel. You believe me, don't you?"

"You're the Earl of Ibrazel. You believe me, don't you?" Francis asked looking at him pleadingly.

"Is that true? Or are you making fun of me?"

"Lydia said that Ibrazel really exists, right? Hearing that, I was able to believe that the two of you really are the Earl and Countess of Ibrazel," Francis said speaking more and more seriously. "The city at the bottom of the sea is similar to your Ibrazel, isn't it? If so, I wonder if maybe it really does exist. Diana said that before she went to England, she had to go to the princess's royal city."

Francis squeezed Edgar's hand as though begging with him.

Edgar could only wish to be spared having a man hold his hand like that, and he pulled his hand free. However, Francis showed no signs of being offended.

"Edgar, would you take me to the city at the bottom of the sea? I think the only one who definitely knows Diana's whereabouts is the princess. I'm sure Lydia's there, too."

"Weren't men who went near there supposed to end up being killed?"

"I have this," Francis said as he pulled out a leather string that was hanging around his neck. A gold key hung from the string. Edgar suspected its shape was unfamiliar most likely because the key was extremely old.

"And that is...?"

"It seemed very important to Diana. She was probably intending to take it with her to the city at the bottom of the sea. I thought that she wouldn't just leave me if she didn't have this."

"In other words, you took it away from her?You're the lowest of low for a man."

"You're absolutely right." Francis looked away sadly. Most likely, there were a number of things he regretted now.

"Are you saying that as long as you have that, even men won't be killed?"

"I'm not sure, but legend has it that if you give the princess what she wishes for, you'll be able to come back alive, right? I think this is the key to the city's floodgate. She ended up losing the city because this was stolen from her. I think, most likely, she wants to get it back. So don't you think it might be what she's wishing for?"

"And if you happen to be wrong in your reasoning?"

Francis looked surprised. Apparently, he hadn't considered that possibility.

"That..... You're the Earl of Ibrazel. Diana's master.It's possible even the princess would show some respect to you because of that."

His tone dropped slightly.

Edgar could only wonder if that were true. It's questionable whether Diana knew about Edgar or not, and even if she did, he didn't know whether she would have acknowledged him as her lord. And the same was true for the half-fae princess. And above all, Edgar didn't know of any way to enter the fae realm. With neither Lydia nor Nico there, to him, the city at the bottom of the sea was a place that existed in fairy tales. That's why he couldn't help wondering. There weren't many people who could take women to the princess's city.

"By the way, is Aeris human?"

Or could she be someone from another realm?

Edgar couldn't tell the difference.

"You mean she's not?"

"If she's human, how is she able to take women to the city at the bottom of the sea?"

Francis considered the question.

The manner in which Lydia and Diana both were taken away to another world was wrapped in mystery. If that were true, then Edgar could do absolutely nothing. But he couldn't help wondering. If Aeris was taking people away to another realm through magic, she was doing a number of things in a rather human manner. Listening to the ladies at the resort hotel and seeking out those who are wanting help. Having the person leave a note behind before taking her away. She was taking a great deal of care to ensure that no one tried to follow after them. If she was taking them away to the bottom of the sea by magic, it shouldn't be possible for anyone to follow. Even if she herself wasn't human, wasn't it possible that the paradise she created for human women was in the human realm?

"Francis, do you know if Aeris owns any islands?" Edgar asked thinking of the painting he'd seen in London--the portrait of Madame d'Armor and the island floating on the sea. A castle-like building had been drawn on the island. If Aeris and the d'Armor who owned the portrait were the same person, that island might provide a hint.

"Island?Come to think of it, I think I heard something before about her having bought an island with an old castle on it."

"Where is that island?"

"Hmm, I didn't learn that much."

Edgar stood. Raven had said he'd been in the midst of investigating the island in the picture, but he'd gained a major hint. Most likely, it wasn't far from the hotel where Aeris once lived.

"Edgar, where are you going?"

"To get Lydia back."

"Eh? You're going already?What if you get killed?"

As if he could do anything once he's dead.

"I guess our fate depends on that key."

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The sky had completely cleared when dawn came. Lydia climbed to the highest point in the castle, and as Nico had said, it was a castle standing on a small mountain island. It was surrounded on all sides by the sea. She stepped out onto the stone lookout surrounding the tower, and her hair streamed behind her as a gentle breeze went by. It reminded her of the touch of the person she wanted to see.

Lydia felt lonely. It might be that she would never be loved like that again. He'd seemed disgusted at Lydia for having kept things from him. He'd left without a word after seeing the ugly bruises on her. Could it be he'd become disenchanted with her? If he'd already been feeling unsatisfied with the marriage, perhaps it's become something definite. But she wanted to see him. She didn't want them to end up being separated like this.

She walked slowly following the railing. The dress she borrowed was a loosely fitted medieval design and it was lined at the bust. Being told that there was no need to wear a corset there, she decided to try doing that, but the feeling of

having the wind making its way through the dress only made her feel even more helpless. Even so, Lydia still didn't feel like returning inside the castle.

She could barely make out the pink granite coast in the distance. And while it was faint, it helped to calm her down. Because it let her think that she wasn't so far away from that hotel and Edgar. The problem was that there was no boat there. There wasn't a single boat on the shore. And when she asked the women she met in the dining room, they only looked at her strangely as though wondering why she wanted to go back. They all realised that they were under the protection of the princess of the famous Bretagne legend, but the princess was like a symbol and the place they were in was like a nunnery under the protection of the Holy Mother.

Most likely, Aeri was different, however. She didn't seem to think anything of Lydia having been brought there by the fae. And though she wanted to speak to Aeri, she'd been unable to find her anywhere that morning. So Lydia could only wander through the castle.

"Hello."

Lydia turned at the sound of a woman's voice. She was unable to remember who the smiling lady was.

The lady was too thin and seemed to be over 30, but it was possible that she was younger. Since she seemed familiar, Lydia figured it was one of the ladies she'd met that morning.

"You look lonely. Are you thinking of your husband?"

"Yes, well....." Lydia wondered if this lady too, couldn't understand why Lydia was thinking of going back.

"But you're here. You can't come to this place unless the princess allows it, so I think there's a reason for you to be here," she said. She then walked to the stone wall surrounding the balcony.

"In that case, I'd like to meet the princess. How can I meet her?" Lydia asked not expecting an answer.

"I don't know, but I wonder if you might be able to see her if you went to the royal city."

"The royal city.....? It's at the bottom of the sea, right? How can I get there?"

The lady pointed at the sea. There was one part of the sea's surface that was slightly different coloured than the rest. A thin path seemed to connect the island to that part which appeared to be a shoal as it spread out offshore.

"When the tide goes out, supposedly you can see the church's steeple in the sea. Since the royal city is supposed to have existed over a thousand years ago, for a person to be able to see a city there probably means that they're seeing another world overlapping there."

"You mean that royal city used to be there? And it was connected to this island?"

She nodded slowly. "This island is the only part of the princess's domain that didn't sink away."

Could that be why Aeris chose this place to protect the women?

"You know a lot about the legend."

"I was born in Bretagne. My family went to America and I married an Englishman who made his fortune there." The woman had a dark look on her face. Most likely, she'd been disillusioned by that marriage and ended up here. But perhaps she felt happiness there because she smiled peacefully.

"Mrs. Lydia, your husband cares a great deal about you, doesn't he? You've never been afraid of men. Otherwise, you'd never think to try to stop a big man with only a woman's thin weak arms, right?"

Lydia's eyes widened in surprise. She recognised the woman before her, but she hadn't met her this morning. They met much earlier, on the stairs at the hotel.....

".....Mrs. Slope.....?" No, she wasn't supposed to use the husband's name when addressing someone here. What was her first name? Or rather...

".....You're alive?"

That wasn't possible. The autumn sun was unusually bright, and her smile at having been freed gave some comfort to make up for Lydia's surprise and confusion.

"I wanted to give you my thanks. It was the first time a person ran out and tried to protect me like that."

But in the end, Lydia had been unable to do anything.

"I'm sorry to have surprised you."

Lydia hurriedly shook her head. The lady's figure faded threatening to disappear in the sun's rays.

"I don't know if it'll be of any help, but there's a portrait of the princess here in this castle. It's the portrait of a lady wearing a red moonstone ring.

The portrait of a lady wearing a moonstone ring. The thing she's looking for might be there?

"Wait! Do you know anything about the legend of that moonstone?"

Lydia tried to stop her, but the lady's figure slowly faded. Only her voice reached Lydia.

".....I've heard that it was her fiance's ring--the only person who tried to save the princess..... That person gave the ring to the princess and tried to save her using its power, but....."

Which means that person was a member of the Blue Knight Earl's house?

Lydia was lost in thought as she stared at the stone wall where Mrs. Slope vanished. In the end, her fiance let go of the princess's hand because if he didn't, he too would be swallowed by the incoming wave. But a portrait was done of the princess wearing his ring? If that was the case, perhaps it meant

that she didn't hate him. Because he tried to save her? She didn't know what the princess's feeling were, but Lydia felt she'd definitely come one step closer to her goal. And she felt some hope in that.

I'll find some clue about Ibrazel then go back to where Edgar is.

It didn't matter how he might react, Lydia wanted to go back. Nor did it matter if she ended up feeling hurt; she wanted to see him. Even if Edgar had been disillusioned with her as a woman, it was possible that he'd still accept Lydia the fairy doctor. And that was enough. Because she wanted to be by his side.

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On a rose-coloured rocky island, a castle stood where the pinkish boulders had been piled. More than on the island, the castle appeared to have been built on the surface of the sea.

"It's the island from the painting. I'm sure of it," Edgar murmured as he looked up at it from the boat. He was slowly getting closer to the island that had been finely drawn in the background of the portrait.

After the conversation in the bar, he and Francis returned to the hotel. Edgar combed through the information he had dealing with the island Aeris owned, and bringing Raven and Kelly with him, he headed for where he thought Lydia might be. Naturally, Francis also came with him. While Francis had previously given up even confirming whether the woman he loved was alive or not, this time he seemed serious.

Edgar had told Kelly to wait at the hotel, but she refused to listen saying she would go too. If the castle in question was the women's paradise Aeris had built, it might be easier to sneak in if a lady was present. Having realised that, Edgar ended up bringing Kelly as well.

"Rumour has it that a widow's been living at that castle for a long time now, but she supposedly hasn't once stepped off that island," the crewman steering the boat said. The tour boat Edgar hired was normally used to view the pink granite coast from the sea, but apparently, it wasn't unusual for tourists to want to see the other islands in the area as well. The crew seemed to think that Edgar and the others as those sorts of foreigners.

"Huh, I wonder how she manages to survive there."

"There's supposed to be someone who delivers any necessary items to the island once a month. But there's no ship on the island itself. The folks at port were wondering about that, since it seems the castle's owner doesn't even allow the servants to leave the island.

"Could it be there's a ship that'll come help them out when they need it?" Francis asked.

"If such a ship existed, you'd quickly be able to find out about it in out in the country. After all, there's no need to hide it in the first place, right?"

Certainly, there'd be no need to hide if a widow or her servants came and went from the castle on occasion. But if women who run away from home were hiding away there, it would be better not to have a way to come and go from the castle freely. They wouldn't want to run into someone they knew if they went to town, and if it seemed that no one was coming and going from there,

no one would suspect that they were hiding in that castle.

"The tidal range in this area is quite great, right? I've heard that there are a number of islands that are connected to the mainland at low tide, but what about that island?"

"It doesn't get completely dry. If you don't mind getting your feet wet, it might be possible to go along the shoal. Well, you'd really have to know the shoal well. If not, the tide would come in and sweep you away while you wandered the shallows."

It was possible if you knew the area well. Edgar suspected Aeris used a carriage. At low tide, she had a carriage come meet her. There would be no wheel tracks left on a path that was lightly covered by seawater. No doubt, she could use that path even at night, so no one would ever see her.

"If you could find the legendary royal city's road that was supposed to be surrounded with walls that held the waters back, it might be possible to come and go on foot."

"From the legend? The royal city that sank to the bottom of the sea?"

"Yeah, that."

"Was it near that island?"

"When I was a kid, I heard that the island was supposedly part of the city..... but those sorts of places seem to exist all over the place along Bretagne's coast," the crewman said laughing. No doubt he meant to say that lots of

opinions existed about the legend complicating things.

"My lord, there are no signs of a watch or guards. There's only one dock and someone who seems to be a scullery maid uses the nearest entrance to it, so most likely it's the back entrance," Raven reported. He'd been observing the island using a spyglass.

Edgar asked the crewman to dock the ship.

"Most likely, you won't be able to see the castle interior." While the crewman didn't understand the conversation in English, he said that as he would to tourists, but Edgar simply smiled.

"The owner is a widow, right? I've never had a woman refuse a request of mine."

A strange expression of understanding crossed the crewman's face and he changed the ship's course and headed towards the dock.

Kelly got of the boat first. At the top of the stone steps from the dock was the back door. Edgar and the others watched from the shadows as Kelly met a woman wearing an apron when she came out of the door. Kelly drew the woman away from the entrance, and as directed by Edgar, she tried to bribe the woman saying she wanted to see the castle. Edgar and the others used that chance to climb the steps and slip into the castle. If it was Aeris's castle, it was unlikely that outsiders would be permitted inside. As expected, the lady refused Kelly's request and they saw her as she made her way back to the dock, but most likely she would be allowed to walk along the shore.

They should be able to leave the ship docked there for a while. During that time, they needed to find Lydia and bring her back with them. There was no one in the kitchen the three of them snuck into. Perhaps it was so quiet because there were so few servants there. It almost seemed as though the widow lived there quietly on her own. However, the large pot filled with potatoes told them that wasn't the case.

"Still, it's almost as though they're not keeping any watch whatsoever."

If she was giving shelter to unfortunate women, she should be a bit more careful. After going through three doors, they came out in the dining room.

Again, there was no one there.

"Hey, Edgar. The crewman said that this might be part of the royal city earlier, didn't he? If that's true, the princess might already know we're here." Francis looked at Edgar uncertainly. "I hope she doesn't use magic and suddenly turn us into frogs."

"If you're scared, how about waiting with Kelly on the ship?" Edgar said shrugging him off and walked towards Raven.

Raven knelt in one corner of the dining room and picked something up.

"What is it, Raven?"

"I found..."

"A clue of Lydia's whereabouts?"

Raven ran off, and Edgar quickly followed him. They ran up an old spiral staircase and Raven opened the door at the end. He stopped in front of a round table.

Just as Edgar felt disappointed looking around the empty room, Raven flipped the table cloth up.

"Wah!" a surprised voice exclaimed from beneath the table. "I-I didn't steal this. I asked the girl in the kitchen if I could eat it. She might not have understood me, but I did ask!" The grey cat hugged a large loaf of bread as though trying to protect it.

"Mr. Nico, you're alright."

Nico slowly turned at the sound of Raven's voice.

"Oh, Raven, it's you.I thought Lydia'd found me. She gave me half her breakfast, but the food here's very simple. Even so, it's not like I can pretend to be a cat and eat scraps either. Or rather, Raven and the earl: what are you two doing here?"

Honestly, he was such a complacent cat.

"What do you mean what are we doing here, Nico? We've come here to find Lydia."

Edgar stared at the strand of Nico's fur as it fluttered in Raven's grip and felt tired. "I see Raven, you were looking for Nico, were you?"

Raven blinked as though realising that for the first time. ".....No, I thought Mrs. Lydia would be with Mr. Nico....."

It was sweet if he was now able to try his best to make excuses. "It's okay to sometimes put your own interests ahead of mine, Raven. Rather than that, Nico, where's Lydia?"

Nico pointed at the door.

"She just ran to the far end of that hallway, so I quickly hid under the tablecloth."

Edgar immediately turned when he heard that.

"Edgar, please don't leave me behind....." Francis panted as he finally managed to climb the steps. Apparently, he wasn't very good at running.

Edgar left him behind as he ran off again. At the end of the hallway was another set of stairs. He climbed further upwards and burst through the door at the top of the stairs. A person's figure was standing in the sun coming through the window. The figure looked his way surprised and had caramel-coloured hair.

"Lydia!" Edgar ran into the room and took her into his arms.

"Edgar.....?"

Feeling her voice, he held her even more tightly. He couldn't help feeling that if he loosened his grip, she would disappear on him. At the same time, Lydia seemed unusually tense and stiff as he held her in his arms.

Ahh, that's right. She might still be angry with him. Because he'd forcefully exposed her injuries. As he wondered how to appease her, Lydia reached up and grabbed his jacket. She trembled as she gripped it tightly.

"I didn't think you would come....."

She clung onto him tightly surprising Edgar. He held her even more tightly as his love for her welled up inside him. "I'm so glad you're alright. I was worried about you."

"The fae used magic on me. So, I couldn't do anything."

"It's okay. I've found you."

".....Are you angry?"

"About what?"

"I'm sorry for keeping things from you....."

"Yeah, I wish you hadn't hidden it from me."

Since he had no intention of blaming her, he kissed her gently on the head.

I'm sorry."

"If you do one thing I ask of you, I'll forget all about it."

".....Okay."

'Eh?' Edgar thought. 'This might not be good.' Even though he was getting ahead of himself, Lydia wasn't getting angry with him. Edgar, too, had done something wrong, yet she didn't blame him. Lydia was that shaken. Perhaps it wasn't too surprising. After all, she'd suddenly been brought to the island, so most likely she'd been feeling helpless from shock.

"You're safe now, so let's go back."

Lydia looked up at him surprised. "Together.....?"

Edgar couldn't understand why she looked that way.

"We can't be separated, not even for a moment, right?"

"Is that okay?"

"As if there's any reason why it wouldn't be."

Her teary golden-green eyes looked away. "Thank goodness....."

But she still didn't seem like she truly felt relieved.

"I'll be careful not to get become injured again."

That wasn't the point.

Sensing that they weren't on the same wavelength, Edgar suddenly realised that while Lydia wasn't angry, she'd been hurt by his attitude when he'd seen the bruises on her body. Lydia had yet to let him see her body. It was as though she felt very unsure having no idea how she looked in a man's eyes. She was completely inexperienced when it came to love, and everything was new to her since getting married. There was no way for her to realise how smitten Edgar was with her, let alone for her to have any confidence in things. It would be understandable for her to have interpreted Edgar's attitude at looking away from her painful bruises as his looking away from her body. It would have been better had she only been angry. Even though he held her in his arms, she was so tense. If he'd ended up hurting her, she wouldn't be able to find any comfort in his kisses and embrace.

"Um, Lydia....." He thought to at least explain, but she suddenly blushed and pulled away from Edgar.

"Edgar, Francis was with you, too?"

"Hey," Francis said as he raised a hand standing in the doorway.

'Honestly, talk about inconsiderate.' Edgar frowned, but Francis seemed

completely oblivious. Raven and Nico, too, followed Francis into the room, and Edgar realised that Lydia wouldn't give herself over to him any more than she had.

"Francis gave me the hint as to where you were. In any case, let's get out of here. We can talk after that."

He wanted to get Lydia away from the island quickly and then to sit down and talk things over. But she hurriedly grabbed his sleeve and said, "Wait."

She then walked over to the wall. "It's that painting, Edgar."

He followed her gaze and saw the portrait. Surprised, Edgar walked towards the painting. It was the picture they'd seen in London. The portrait of a lady wearing a mask. And on her finger, was a red moonstone ring with the exact same setting as Lydia's white moonstone. Behind the noble lady was a small island floating in the sea. And on the island, exactly as Edgar had seen a short time earlier from the boat, was an slightly orange-hued pink castle.

"I found out about the legend of the red moonstone. This portrait is supposed to be of the princess of the city that sank in the sea."

Unlike how she'd in his arms having lost all confidence, the Lydia who'd found a lead looked at him directly. Edgar felt a hint of jealousy. For Lydia, her role as fairy doctor was what was most important to her. Probably even more important than being Edgar's wife. Even so, he didn't think she only had a little love for him. For her, being a fairy doctor was an essential part of who she was, so there was no comparison. While he knew that, he still had to control himself from wanting everything.

It was wrong to wish to make others do as he wanted. If he did, he would be no different than the prince. Like the prince who controlled people's will and lives. Since he didn't want to become like that, together with Lydia, he sought a means in which to eradicate the prince. As the new Blue Knight Earl. In which case, he couldn't ignore the lead that was right before him and that Lydia said she'd found.

"Edgar, the legendary royal city is supposed to be nearby. If we can meet the princess, I'm sure we'll also be able to learn something about Ibrazel, too....."

"Yes, no doubt. Not to mention that the lady in this portrait is Aeris d'Armor."

"Eh?" Lydia exclaimed in surprise and looked up at him. "Aeris is..... this portrait's.....?"

"How well you realised it, Earl Ashenbert."

Aeris stood in the doorway. Edgar took one step forward as though to hide Lydia.

"Or perhaps I should say the Prince of Calamity." Aeris's red lips raised into a smile.

"It seems you know about me."

"Yes, I know a lot about you. And that it was a great mistake for you to have been born into this world."

Edgar sensed Lydia's breath catch as she stood behind him. He tensed as he stared at Aeris.

"So it was you who'd spoken the words of a curse upon me at Sylvanford."

"That's right. I'm an old friend of your mother's family. They were a noble lineage of the French nobility. Or at least they were until the time the wife of the head of the family had a tryst with a member of the Stuart royalty who was in exile and had an illegitimate child."

Edgar realised she was talking about his and his mother's ancestor and accepted it with little surprise. He'd already suspected as much. The prince tried to get Edgar wanting the same Stuart family blood as he himself had. As a duke, his father's family had old blood ties with the English royal family. But it was his mother's lineage that the prince cared about, and it wasn't until later that he learned that that side was closely related to the prince who's supposed to be Prince Charles Edward's illegitimate child.

There's a bloodline that isn't shown on the family genealogy, which means there was an illicit affair that none but a few knew about. Most likely, that in itself wasn't particularly unusual. Whether it was a simple love affair or more politically motivated, it's something that's commonly happened. And his mother's side comes from the French aristocracy. So Edgar naturally thought that the descendant of James the II who'd been exiled to France was somehow related to his mother.

"For the prince, the body he needed had to be closely related to himself. Otherwise, the evil magic power he carried at birth would end up being weakened. And it's because of that that your mother caught their attention."

"In other words, you've known my mother's ancestors from before they were exiled to England during the French Revolution. You've lived quite a long time."

"Something that occurred a mere half century earlier is like something that happened yesterday." Aeris chuckled.

She slowly walked towards Edgar and the others.

"The illegitimate child was a girl. And her child was also a girl, and eventually, Jeanne-Marie was born. It was pure chance that no boy was born until then. It was possible that Jeanne-Marie would give birth to a boy. By that time, the prince had grown old and wanted a new body. And that's why the prince had the still young Jeanne-Marie become betrothed to one of his followers who was a member of the nobility and carried Stuart family blood."

Most likely that was the Marquess Birkstone who had been one of the prince's men and who had once been his mother's fiance. A man Edgar had driven to commit suicide.

"It was her fiance's wish that she attend the girls' school that was part of a convent in France. In that place where girls of good families were sent and where boys were forbidden, she was to be given Catholic teaching and become his ideal wife."

Edgar could only listen silently. He was riveted by what Aeris had to say.

"It was ideal for me. I became her teacher at the convent and taught her to

shun men. Just how far her blood and her descendants would continue to be exploited, that risk..... But it seems Jeanne-Marie couldn't understand that. Or her own value and her own fate. Let alone just how much misfortune the wrong action would bring about. She was like any girl who dreamed of becoming a happy bride, only she was an exceptionally beautiful young girl. And the world is full of temptation."

Edgar's memories of his mother were the same. When put in a social setting, she made anyone and everyone become enamoured with her. She ignored harsh truths and slanderous lies. She never noticed Edgar's little lies and escapades, and to her, he was the perfect son.

"When she turned 17, she returned to England in order to be presented at court, and she never returned to me after that. The son of a duke fell in love with her at first sight, and she readily abandoned her fiancé to marry him. She never thought that that action would bring the worst misfortune upon the duke's family."

Aeris stood before the portrait, and just like his memory of that day long ago, she turned those dark foreboding eyes on Edgar. "You're the same way, lord. Like Jeanne-Marie, in seeking your own happiness, you will have those around you meet with the worst misfortunes. She... no, you brought about the destruction of the duke's household."

"You're wrong! It's not Edgar's fault!" Lydia shouted.

"Even if it wasn't his intent, his existence dragged those around him into meeting a horrible fate. Because he was born, the duke and Jeanne-Marie both died. His relatives and the retainers to the household, too, were all killed because of him."

Because she was absolutely correct, Edgar couldn't say anything, and he only felt a strong feeling of regret. It would have been better had he never been born. He remembered his despair when his father told him that.

"Lydia, he'll end up taking you down with him."

"I..... believe in Edgar."

Really? You're the one who'd been hurt. Edgar's the one who hurt you.

Lydia grabbed hold of Edgar's arm as he stood there confused.

"The mermaid's song..... Aeris, that was your magic, wasn't it.....!"

The princess of the ancient royal city narrowed her eyes slightly. "That's right. This is part of the magic royal city. A place where my magic reigns. And like the legend says, men cannot return from here alive....."

Just as they noticed the sound of rushing water, a huge wave approached from outside the window.

Lydia. He started to hold her, but hesitated for an instant. He couldn't help wondering if his decision would one day drag her to meet the same fate as his parents.

Chapter 5: Vision from the Bottom of the Sea

"Lydia, you should never have married him."

Aeris's voice came out from somewhere in the darkness.

"You're a member of the MacKeel clan of the highlands. A person who carries an old ability that connects the fae and humans."

While she was at the MacKeels, Lydia learned that three ancient families carried fae magic of the Seelie and Unseelie courts both. The Blue Knight Earl's family of Ibrazel, the royal Connaught family of Ireland, and the MacKeel clan of the highlands. The Connaught family had long since died out, and the Blue Knight Earl's family died out 100 years earlier when the final member of the family died. The MacKeel family was the only one to survive, but they'd since lost the magic of the Unseelie Court. Since it was a dangerous ability, all of the families had been very careful to keep the ability from being used for evil. So much so that the Blue Knight Earl's family had chosen to lock away that magic. But it was a traitor from the MacKeel clan that used it of their own volition. And from that evil fae magic, the "Prince of Calamity" was born with the intent of taking revenge on the English royal family.

The memories of the first prince who'd been born at that time, was currently inside Edgar. In other words, Edgar was the only one who carried the evil fae magic that the three ancient families had fearfully kept and later lost. If by any chance, he should be taken over by the prince's memories, it was possible that the fearsome magic that had been hidden away could change both the human realm and Faerie.

"You even knew about me, didn't you?" Lydia said.

"The sea tells me many things," Aeris replied. "While people say that they're separated by the sea, everything's connected to it."

"And the sea told you that Edgar became the prince's successor?"

A member of the sea. That's what she'd said.

"If I don't know about changes that happen in the fae realm, I can't protect my country. My connections with those of the sea bring me important information.

The thought that came to Lydia's mind was of Ermine who'd become a selkie. There weren't many who knew that Edgar had taken in the prince's memories, and perhaps it wasn't a coincidence that she'd thought she'd seen her at the hotel.

"And that's why you tried to get me away from Edgar?"

"That's right. I enticed you with the picture of the red moonstone that's tied to the Blue Knight Earl. In order to bring you here to Bretagne."

"And you're also the one who tried to take me into the sea with the mermaid's song?"

"I absolutely wanted to have you come here."

"That's rather forceful."

Aeris responded to Lydia's criticism firmly, "You'll be killed if the prince awakens."

"Edgar won't be overcome by the prince's memories. He promised me."

"Promised?" Aeris murmured and laughed. "You actually believe a man's promise?"

"You might have been betrayed by your lover and can no longer trust men, but not all of them are unfaithful. Your fiancé tried to save you after all, didn't he?"

"Lydia, he didn't want to save me, he just wanted to do what was right—to do the good deed of trying to save a poor girl. That's why I let go of his hand. And he loosened his grip as though he'd been waiting for it. And that way he didn't have to be bothered by a guilty conscience."

"Do you really believe that? If so, then why did you have a portrait done with you wearing the red moonstone ring? That ring was your fiancé's, wasn't it?"

Aeris paused pensively. "That's... an unusual stone. As it sank together with me, it changed the colour of everything around me—the sea, the sky, even Bretagne's coast. They were all coloured a light hue as though the ring had dissolved. And I think that gave me a little comfort at that time. That perhaps it wasn't so bad to end up sinking in the rose-coloured sea....." Her words trailed off as she struggled to contain her memories. But after that, she'd returned to her usual cold manner of speech. "Gemstones don't betray people. But that

painting was simply to get your attention and entice you here."

Lydia wondered if that were true. And if a person would wear on their own hand, even if only in a painting, the ring of the man who'd abandoned them simply for that purpose.

"Lydia, think about it. It's too late to regret things once you've been betrayed. You're the prince's enemy. In the MacKeel clan, there's the one known as the prophet, and you are his betrothed. Since you're the one closest to the prophet, it puts you in great danger. Isn't that right?" Aeris then continued gently as though to reason with Lydia. "And that's why you're also the key to fighting the prince. I too am a bridge between people and the fae, and as the survivor, for the sake of this city, I don't want to lose you."

"You presume too much! I'm not a member of the MacKeel clan. I'm Edgar's fairy doctor!"

Lydia ran off into the darkness.

Aeris's voice followed after her. "You've realised it already, haven't you? That your marriage was a mistake."

Lydia never once thought that. At least not on her part. But Edgar? She didn't know, which is why she was afraid.

"Stop it.....!"

She covered her ears as she ran blindly. Her moonstone ring glowed, and Lydia suddenly found herself free of the darkness. She stood alone in a marble

hall. Aeris's voice and presence had were gone. Lydia gently stroked her white moonstone wedding ring, and it twinkled as though to reassure her.

"I mustn't doubt." Since realising that Edgar might not be content and not knowing what to do, the only thing Lydia could think of doing was to become indispensable to him as a fairy doctor. But even if she was wanting in some way, they were a married couple. And this gem was a definite bond she had with Edgar.

She had to find Edgar.

Aeris saw him as 'the prince' and was trying to eliminate him. She'd said that men couldn't return alive.

'She didn't mean, that he's already.....' Lydia panicked and ran off frantically.

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'You should never have been born.'

Those were the last words he remembered his father saying to him. And the Edgar who was the legitimate son of Duke Sylvanford died at that time. And not just because he was considered dead and had been stolen away by the prince's organisation. His father pointed a gun at him and denounced him, so could he truly claim himself to be Duke Sylvanford's son? So he became a non-entity and survived. Despite that, deep down, a part of him still thought of himself as the heir of a duke. Even if his father didn't acknowledge him, he was dead now, and Edgar was therefore in the position of inheriting Sylvanford in its entirety. Even if no one else knew, the undeniable fact that he was the head of a duke's

family, and his honor as a nobleman supported him all this time.

But even he'd thought countless times, 'if only he'd never been born.' The beautiful property at Sylvanford—the members of the duke's family would no doubt be living there peacefully, even now. And even if his parents hadn't had a male heir, they would probably have been happy having a sweet daughter. If the prince hadn't seen that his relatives were killed as well, there were potential male heirs in branch families.

'You should never have been born.'

'One day, you will kill your parents.'

His chest tightened as he remembered Aeris's words.

"Lydia, he'll end up taking you down with him."

Could that be true. Could he really be someone who seemed fated to only bring misfortune down on those around him?

"You poor thing. You're feeling quite hurt, aren't you, my lord."

Edgar opened his eyes upon hearing a voice next to him. Where was he? There were several white pillars, and the place resembled a temple. Several scantily clad women surrounded him, and he was lying down on an old-fashioned divan.

"Are you Aeris's underlings?"

He sat up, but they hung around him enchantingly.

"Forget about that sort of thing."

"We'll help you forget all your troubles."

Gentle arms wrapped themselves around him. Their translucent white skin enticed him from beneath the fabric of their clothes, and their lips curled in alluring smiles. Soft fingers stroked him on the cheek tracing down along his neck and tried to undo his tie. He wrapped his arm around the nearest woman's waist, and she immediately cuddled against him. Even though he was a little rough as he lay her down on the divan and lay over her, the enchantingly beautiful woman smiled. Edgar smiled back at her and wrapped his hands around her slender neck and started to tighten his grip.

"Where's Lydia?"

Just before being swallowed by the wave in the old castle, he'd gotten over his momentary uncertainty, and grabbed Lydia's hand. He'd held on desperately determined not to let go. If this was part of Aeris's magical domain, Lydia should be nearby.

The woman flailed as she struggled to breathe, and the others drew back. Among the others, someone said, "My lord..... please stop. We were only trying to comfort you."

"I'm not so sexually frustrated as to fall for seduction."

He noticed a damp breeze stir, and the woman he was holding down changed

shape. Her body was covered with scales and her tail arched. Surprised, he let go, but the mermaids sent up a spray seawater as they rushed him. Just then, a flash of silver danced through the air. The mermaids screamed, and a fairy in the form of a young child leapt over their heads and landed in front of Edgar.

"Arrow."

The completely silver fairy grinned as he looked up at Edgar.

(You called, my lord?)

Edgar had called countless times, yet he hadn't appeared.

Edgar looked at him exasperated as he got to his feet. "Hurry up and give me my sword."

The silver fairy touched his hand to his chest as though in salute. He seemed to shine for an instant and the next moment, a sword stood there thrust into the marble floor. A large star sapphire decorated the hilt; it was the Blue Knight Earl's great sword.

The mermaids slowly edged away as Edgar grabbed the sword and asked them,

"Where's Lydia?"

"We..... don't know!"

Even before he could wield the sword, the mermaids all vanished. Edgar sighed as he lowered the sword.

"Arrow, just where were you playing about?" he asked sharply of the fairy that was the star in the star sapphire.

(I beg your pardon. But please don't be upset. I'd been captured.)

"Huh? When? By whom?"

(I was relaxing at the hotel when I was suddenly caught in the mermaids' magic, and ended up being hauled away here. After that, I was locked up here in this royal city.)

"In other words, this is the royal city at the bottom of the sea that's mentioned in legend?"

(That's right. It's in the rift between the human world and Faerie.)

Since it was partly in the fae realm, that probably explained why he could clearly see Arrow.

"So, Aeris knew about you, too?"

In order to steal Lydia away and ensure that Edgar had no means to try and follow after, she'd been careful to imprison Arrow.

(The princess of Armorica seems to be well-informed about the people of Ibrazel.)

"Madame d'Armor—the lady of Armorica..... I see. She's been openly naming herself the princess of the ancient royal city."

He could see the sky beyond the white pillar. Leaving the building, a breeze smelling of the sea blew against him. Apparently, it wasn't at the bottom of the sea. This building that stood at the top of a cliff, likely was in fact a temple. He could see a town below. The rose-coloured town was made from rose-coloured stone and looked as though time had stood still and that the town hadn't sunk to the bottom of the sea one thousand and some hundreds of years ago. There were no signs of any people.

(It's low tide right now. That and this time of year—it seems that for one day only, the royal city is released from the bottom of the sea. And as it was in the past, as a garrison city, it's very close to the human realm.)

Apparently, even though he'd been imprisoned in the city, Arrow had been busy gathering information.

"Still, that woman... if she thinks that things would be better without me, she should have come after me at the hotel or in London and killed me."

(If she were human, she probably would have done so. However, since she's already abandoned the human world, she can no longer take a human life. Although things are different here in her domain.)

"I see. In other words, by following after Lydia, I essentially fell into her trap."

Edgar found himself in an area where the houses came to an end and stared at the tall wall. He could see the horizon beyond it.

"Is this the breakwater? That's supposed to surround the royal city?"

(That's right. The city was said to have been below water level even when the tide was out, and it was protected by that wall.)

"But the devil enticed the princess's lover into stealing the floodgate's key, and the city ended up sinking to the bottom of the ocean."

(The floodgate is still open, even now. But once a year, the waters of Faerie fall lower than the floodgate, so the city is able to come up to the surface. Although it's not visible from the human realm.)

"But that small island is part of the human realm, right?"

The breakwater continued straight out offshore. And at the end of it was the island with the stone castle. The city and that island was connected by a path protected on both sides by a breakwater. Even though the royal city had sunk to the bottom of the sea, since that island had always jutted up above the surface of the sea, it probably hadn't ended up sinking with the city.

(That small island is now the only path connecting this city with the human realm. This place will soon sink to the bottom of the sea again. You need to get out of here soon, or you won't be able to get back.)

"You mean that once it sinks, there's no way to return to the human realm?"

(Even before that, my lord, you can't survive at the bottom of the sea, can you?)

He was absolutely correct. He wasn't like that half-fae princess.

"How much time do we have?"

(Until sunset.)

He had to find Lydia before then.

(I can feel Bow's presence. It's faint as the mermaids' magic is interfering. This way.)

Edgar followed Arrow who had changed form to that of a young child with silver hair and skin. At a glance, the building seemed Roman with rows of pillars continuing down its long passageway that seemed without end. It was very convoluted and surprisingly vast. He didn't know how many doors he went through. Edgar stopped in one room. A silver-haired young man was there.

Francis seemed quite happy as he was surrounded by inviting women. He drank some wine from his glass which as constantly being refilled, and accepting one kiss after another, he looked completely at ease.

"Hm? Edgar? You should come over here, too."

'Talk about hopeless.' Edgar thought as he looked at him in disbelief.

(It seems he's quite sexually frustrated,) Arrow muttered to Edgar.

"You seem to really be enjoying yourself, aren't you, Francis? Do you want to end up at the bottom of the sea with the mermaids?"

Edgar grabbed Francis by the collar and hauled him to his feet.

"Come now, don't look so angry. I'll share this fortune with you. You can take whichever girl you like with you."

Francis was acting so blasé that Edgar couldn't help getting angry.

Didn't you come all that way because of your feelings for Diana?"

"Diana?Ah, but she abandoned me. I must've been out of my mind. Even though they're not her, there are lots of wonderful women, after all!"

He knocked Edgar's hand away and dove back into the women's midst. The women shrieked in delight as he held them in his arms. He was completely under the mermaid's spell.

Edgar didn't have time to deal with him. As he turned to leave, another woman clung to his arm. He tried to push her away, but she wrapped her arms around his neck and clung to him. She seemed decidedly unwilling to let go.

"Edgar, don't be so cold. Ahh, perhaps that girl's more to your liking. She looks a lot like Lydia."

Edgar automatically looked where Francis pointed. Lydia stood there looking surprised.

"Lydia....."

Edgar panicked. The half-naked woman was still clinging to him.

".....Lydia, it's not that way. This..."

Lydia turned and ran off.

Edgar somehow managed to push the woman away and chased after Lydia.

(Lord, would it be alright if I took care of things here?" Arrow asked. A voluptuous woman was clinging to him.

"Yeah. And get Francis to snap out of it!" Edgar replied as he frantically ran after Lydia. He finally managed to catch up to her half-way down the pillared hall.

Lydia was panting when she turned. She frowned as she looked up at Edgar. It was her angry look. But tears welled in her eyes and he could no longer hold

back.

"Please, don't get the wrong idea, Lydia. Those women were a magic trap of Aeris's. But I resisted temptation. It's true. Just ask Arrow. After all, the fae don't lie, right?"

He carefully drew her to him making sure she didn't fight and was relieved when she didn't resist as much as he thought she would.

"You're the only one for me."

".....Really?"

He could hardly bear how dear she was to him when she pressed her head to him.

"Yeah. Magic can't possibly tear us apart. We have to hurry and get out of here."

"Am I really the only one you love?"

Edgar smiled gently at the golden-green eyes that stared up uncertainly at him. He absolutely would not frighten her or cause her sorrow. He'd determined that before marrying her, so he wanted to become someone who could accept her unequivocally.

"Of course."

"In that case, promise me. That you'll never leave me."

Just as he was about to answer, someone yelled at him.

"Edgar, don't be fooled!"

It was Lydia's voice. The person that came running towards him from the other side of the pillars was without question Lydia.

"If you promise her, you'll be trapped forever at the bottom of the sea!"

Lydia seemed flustered when she looked at Edgar and the Lydia that was with him. Her breath caught. She blinked several times then took several deep breaths as she tried to calm herself.

"Y-you're a mermaid, aren't you? Stop using my image!"

"Y.....you too, stop trying to confuse him with magic!" The Lydia in Edgar's arms shot back.

"Edgar, I'm the real Lydia." The other Lydia looked at him desperately with her golden-green eyes trying to convince him.

"It's dangerous, move away from her."

"Wait. Which one of you is the real one?"

He couldn't help asking the stupid question.

"I am!"

"I am!"

Naturally, both of them said that.

"Hurry, let's get out of here." The first Lydia pulled on Edgar's arm.

"You mustn't go with her. I'm the real Lydia." The other Lydia grabbed the hem of his jacket.

(My lord, water's incoming!) Arrow's voice said. He could hear the roar as water came rushing towards them from the far end of the corridor. He had to protect Lydia. But which one? He wavered for an instant before choosing suddenly. He pulled the Lydia who'd grabbed his jacket to him, and they ran up the stairs next to them.

Feeling the torrent rushing by their feet, Edgar held Lydia in his arms and lifted her up to the next step. They took shelter by the pillar and clung to one another as they waited for the sound of rushing water to subside.

After everything became quiet again, Lydia slowly looked up at Edgar. The look on her face was mixed, almost like she was about to cry. "Did you know it was me?"

"You're wearing the moonstone ring." He held her hand which bore the wedding ring.

The stone carried the magic of the guardian spirit who was also the first Blue Knight Earl's wife. No doubt, the mermaid's magic had been unable to replicate it.

Edgar buried his fingers in her hair by her ear making. Lydia reacted almost as though it tickled, and her mouth finally relaxed.

"Thank goodness....." she said.

But the mermaid wearing Lydia's appearance stood behind her. Realising she held a long object like a trident in her hand, Edgar pushed Lydia who'd been in his arms behind him.

(You can try to protect her, but sooner or later, you'll kill her.)

The mermaid's, or perhaps it was Aeris's voice, echoed in his mind. She aimed straight for him.

(Lord, your sword!)

Edgar heard Arrow's voice and felt the weight of the great sword in his hand, but he couldn't raise it. The person coming at him was Lydia. If he used the sword, he would end up harming Lydia exactly as Aeris said. Even if it wasn't the real Lydia, that image would be burned in his mind, no doubt he and Lydia, who was there with him, would both end up being tormented by that as though by a curse.

"Edgar!" Lydia screamed from behind him, but Edgar stopped the mermaid with his body. He gasped as he felt a sharp pain in his side. His legs started to collapse under him when someone's arm supported him; it was Francis. Arrow wielded the sword himself and the mermaids fled and disappeared. Edgar heard Lydia's voice next to him.

"It's a mermaid's trident. We have to get it out quickly, or your body will turn to stone....."

'Really?' Edgar was in a daze as he grabbed the trident intending to take it out, but Francis's hand stopped him. While he seemed quite feeble, he's grip was surprisingly strong as he held Edgar's wrist.

"Don't. The trident's barbed. We'll have to push it through....."

Lydia seemed to be in the greater pain as she knit her brows looking like she was about to cry.

(Getting caught by this sort of magic..... In your case, you're sexually frustrated only when it comes to your wife, huh?) Arrow quipped.

Edgar couldn't laugh. Arrow was right.

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Kelly waiting for a while by the small tour boat, but her master showed no signs of returning.

'I wonder if everything's alright. I wonder if they found Mrs. Lydia.'

Trying to forget her worry, she tried walking around the castle a little. The area that could be called a beach was very small and high rocks soon stopped her. It was difficult to walk quickly around the island. Since the castle was built upon a crag, she had no idea what was happening inside the castle. In the end, she soon decided to return to the pier when she heard a scream and stopped.

Peering through the bushes, she saw the female servant being held from behind by a man near the back door. Perhaps he meant to use her as a hostage. He continued to hold her that was as he took her away.

A number of boats had pulled up to the pier and several men armed with knives entered the castle.

'Surely they're not thieves?'

Kelly caught sight of the small boat she'd come on further out at sea. Most likely, they'd fled.

"You're kidding..... We can't get back now."

Making sure that the men were no longer in sight, Kelly came out from the bushes and peered into the back entrance. It seemed like they'd all gone further inside. There was no one there.

'What should I do? The master is inside, too. I have to let them know about the thieves and about the boat leaving us behind.'

She entered the kitchen and cautiously continued on to the corridor. Going up the stairs at the end of the hall, she found herself in a large room. The stairs continued further upwards.

'Which way should I go?'

As she debated, she suddenly heard a sound.

"Gyaa!"

She heard a terrible scream and the far door suddenly burst open. A grey cat came running out.

"Mr. Nico!"

Nico grabbed onto Kelly.

"Help me!" he said as he hid behind her skirt. For some reason, a big man who seemed angry came running after Nico. He had a scratch on his cheek. The man held an axe in his hand.

"I-I'm supposed to save you?!"

Kelly froze and she felt herself break into a cold sweat as she met the man's eyes. The man grinned and said something, but Kelly couldn't understand. Even though she didn't understand, the lewd look in his eyes was more than enough for her to realise she was in danger.

Kelly paled and screamed when the man grabbed her arm. She struggled frantically against him, and the man suddenly let go and she ended up falling. She quickly looked up only to have the big man suddenly collapse in front of her. A young man with brown-coloured skin stood there coolly and blood dripped from the knife in his hand.

"Mr. Raven....."

'I'm safe,' Kelly thought still trembling. Raven drew closer and held out his hand. Startled, she wondered if it was really alright for her to take his hand, and in that brief instant, he reached down and pulled Nico out from under her.

"Are you alright, Mr. Nico?"

"Ah..... oh, it's you, Raven. You saved me."

Nico shivered after Raven put him down on the floor. He then straightened his fur.

"Kelly, your safe now, too."

At Nico's comment, Raven finally looked at Kelly.

"Miss Kelly, why are you here?"

Kelly got to her feet under her own power feeling a mix of disbelief and resignation.

"I saw thieves enter and came to warn the master..... Also, our boat's; the crew fled with it."

Raven simply nodded. "Understood. However, Lord Edgar and Mrs. Lydia seem to have been taken away by magic. I'll go search for them."

"'You'll go...' But where?"

By the time Kelly asked her question, Raven had already started walking, and it was Nico who answered her.

"Most likely, they're both—and Francis, too—are at the princess's royal city."

"The royal city?"

Kelly hurriedly followed after Nico. Leaving the room, Raven started climbing up the stairs.

"Aeris apparently used magic, and the earl and Lydia ended up being taken away by a wave. Aeris is apparently the princess who ended up sinking together with the legendary royal city."

Kelly didn't know how to react at having folk legend and reality becoming all jumbled together. However, she was currently conversing with someone who was in the shape of a cat, and she also knew that Lydia was a fairy doctor. Even back in her home in the highlands, for whatever reason, she believed that a number of legends and magics weren't just made-up stories. But since she'd

never had the opportunity to see such things first-hand, apparently she needed a bit of time in order to realise that they were real.

"Raven, can you see it?"

Raven was looking out from the highest window on the staircase.

"Yes."

Kelly ran over to the window and exclaimed. A city could be seen floating on the sea. A road went straight out from the island dividing the sea. At the end of the road was a town made from stone and surrounded by tall walls.

"It's Bretagne's legendary royal city at the bottom of the sea. It's come up because the tide's gone out."

Nico had at some point jumped up onto Raven's shoulder.

"Everyone was taken there?"

It was a beautiful capital city that could rival Paris. Waterways ran in all directions, and what appeared to be a palace stood at the highest point. Bathed in sunlight, it shone brightly.

"We'll steal a boat and go," Raven said, but Nico jumped onto the window sill and stood with his arms cross.

"No, wait, Raven. Most likely, you won't be able to see that from the sea. You can see it from here because this place is part of the royal city. Since the city's floating on the surface of the sea right now, it's probably as close as it ever gets to the human realm, but it's still the city of another realm."

"In that case, how can we get there?"

"The only choice is to use that corridor."

Nico pointed at the road that led directly towards the island. But it was surrounded on both sides by high walls and the road itself was under the sea.

"It seems the only choice is to swim."

'Surely he's joking,' Kelly thought. 'There's something wrong with this person.'

"Raven, if you do that, how are you going to bring the earl and Lydia back?"

".....You're right."

Kelly felt relieved that he seemed to be rethinking things through. She gazed at the corridor.

"Hey, you said this castle's also part of the royal city, right? If that's the case, could there be some sort of mechanism we can use to remove the water? Otherwise, there'd be no point for this island to be at the end of that corridor. It would seem even more likely if this place acted as the entrance to the city."

"I see..." Nico crossed his arms.

"There must be an exit from this castle to that corridor then. Let's go look for it."

"But Raven, if that's the case, we'll be found by the others. They were gathering every last woman in the castle in the main hall."

"In that case, I'll take care of the others first."

"That's impossible. You don't know how many of them there are."

'No kidding. Saying he'll take care of them. Just what did he expect to do on his own?'

"There are thirteen of them." Kelly answered even though she thought he was being foolish. "I was watching at the pier, so I'm sure." Kelly said the words impulsively possibly because she'd hoped to see Raven look dismayed.

"Understood. Three of them should no longer be able to move, so that leaves ten people."

'What does he mean "understood"?!

Raven turned and headed down the stairs. Since Nico followed after him, Kelly had no choice but to follow.

"Wait a minute. Are you planning on taking on ten thieves all by yourself?!"

"Those people aren't thieves."

".....That's not the point....."

"There was one man who appeared to be a gentleman among them. That man had been staying at the same hotel as we are. It's Mr. Slope. The man who is wanted for having pushed his wife out the window."

Kelly's jaw dropped in surprise and she exchanged looks with Nico.

"Even though he shoved her out the window, he seems to believe that she's actually alive and that she got away from him. Maybe it's because they never found her body, but I don't know if you'd call that incredibly controlling, but that guy's not sane."

"Since he seemed to think Mrs. Lydia was hiding Mrs. Slope, he must have quietly followed Lord Edgar after learning that he'd hired a ship and come to this island."

Raven suddenly stopped and turned to look at Kelly.

"There's a servant's corridor that leads from here to the main hall. Miss Kelly, please lure them out one at a time," he said looking calm.

"Eh? Me?!"

"It's a lady's maid's job, isn't it?"

It was the first time she'd ever heard that.

"A lady's maid should be willing to risk her life if it's for the lady of the house's sake."

"Are you saying that you're willing to throw your life away for the master's sake?!"

"Of course."

Kelly couldn't help thinking that she might not survive if she tried to work on the same level as he did. But there didn't seem to be any other choice. Gathering her determination, Kelly entered the servant's passageway. The passageway was narrow only allowing one person to use it at a time. She followed the corridor until she eventually came to a door at the end. The main hall should be on the other side of the door. She tried to open the door, but the old door refused to open. She pushed against it hard, and it protested loudly as it suddenly gave way sending Kelly tumbling into the main hall.

"Ow....."

Looking up, Kelly found all the men in the main hall looking at her. She quickly got to her feet, turned, and ran back the way she came.

"Hey, there's still another woman!"

"Get her!"

Just as she realised she heard those words spoken in English, several people ran into the corridor chasing after her. Kelly ran as fast as she could, but they seemed to be catching up to her.

"Kelly, hit the ground!"

She suddenly heard Nico's voice.

More than dropping down, she ended up falling flat on the floor, and something flew over top her head. Further down the corridor, she could hear cries of pain echoing one after another when everything suddenly went quiet. She slowly looked up and found Raven looking down at her.

"Didn't I say one at a time?"

You don't have to look so angry.....

She almost felt like crying. And almost as though he were completely oblivious of her, Raven then murmured, "There are four people left."

He then ran off towards the main hall. Kelly stayed there in shock, and it was Nico who finally helped her get up. He certainly was a gentleman. But a small cat's hand wasn't much help, so in the end, Kelly got up using her own strength.

"Thank you, Mr. Nico."

Nico stroked his whiskers happily. "Now then, most likely Raven will take care of the men, but it'll be up to you to calm the women in the castle down. After all, we're intruders here, too."

Nico was absolutely right.

By the time Kelly reached the main hall, Raven had already finished taken care of the other men. However, rather than trying to speak to the women who were scared and didn't understand what was happening, he just stood there. Kelly couldn't tell if he was very capable, or utterly incompetent. She hurried and stood before the other women.

"Everyone, please calm down. The thieves can no longer cause any harm. We're here to help you." She wasn't sure if they understood English. The ladies and servants were all huddled in one corner, but several people among them looked relieved at Kelly's words, so a number of them must have understood her.

"I'm Countess Lydia Ashenbert's lady's maid. I believe the countess came here after being invited by Lady Aeris, and we came to bring her home when we ended up getting caught up in this commotion..... Ah, please don't worry. He's the earl's attendant."

"Mrs. Lydia's...? Come to think of it, she was asking about as to how she could get back home. So she really did just happen to come by here." One woman looking like a noble lady said.

"Umm, but I don't see Mrs. Lydia anywhere, so I think she went with Lady Aeris to the town north of here. Does anyone know how to use the sea corridor?"

The women all looked at one another. Kelly wondered what she could do if the legendary royal city was a forbidden subject. They might end up getting kicked out. Kelly stood nervously, but an old woman at the back slowly got to her feet.

"If Lady Aeris took her to the town, then your lady is in no danger. You should wait until she returns."

".....The master ended up following after the missus."

A murmur ran through the crowd as everyone was startled.

"Men cannot return from that town alive."

"I will go to that town even if I have to swim there," Raven stated firmly.

"You are also a man. Do you intend to throw your life away?"

"It's my duty to protect the master."

The old woman slowly stepped forward. Her white hair was so long it reached the floor. "Very well. In that case, come this way."

She used a cane and walked as though dragging her feet. Kelly caught a glimpse of the woman's feet from beneath her long skirt's hem. It looked like a fish's tail. Kelly decided not to think too much about it. After all, this was the legendary princess's royal city.

"If you close the floodgate and release the water, it will connect the island with the city. You can use the carriage. However, the town and the corridor will both sink beneath the sea when the sun goes down. If you haven't returned by then, you, too, will end up at the bottom of the sea."

Kelly nodded as she fought the frightening thought of going someplace completely unknown.

"One man got away. His name's Slope and he killed his wife. Just in case, please be careful," Raven said.

For some reason, the woman laughed as though amused. "It would be good if the one that is your master can give the princess her wish."

That was the only way for a man to be able to return from that city alive. Kelly bit her lip as she remembered that legend.

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Apparently the temple-like building was also the mermaids' home. Leaving that building, Lydia felt the effects of their magic weaken. Francis helped Edgar, and the three of them along with the silver fairy somehow managed to reach the inner city. The door to one building had been left wide open, so they took shelter there. The private residences in the inner city were still in the same

state as they'd been when the town flourished. Laundry flapped on the clothesline, and a pot hung by the hearth. While it seemed as though time had stopped, there was no sign of any people.

The great sword Arrow along with Lydia's moonstone Bow set up a ward against magic on the building, so they should be safe from discovery by the mermaids for a while. Lydia set some logs in the fireplace and she lit a fire using a match Edgar had.

With the fire lit, it seemed even more like they'd taken refuge in some private residence and they could almost forget they were in another realm. It seemed hard to believe that the town had been at the bottom of the sea. The logs and the furniture were all dry. There was even plenty of fresh water in the water jugs.

Francis sat Edgar down on a wooden bench.

"It's in very deep, yet there's almost no blood....." Francis said as he examined Edgar's wound.

"I think it's because it's a magic trident. The wound should disappear once it's taken out."

"That's good..... If there's no need to worry about bleeding, even a drunken doctor should be of some use, Francis," Edgar joked despite most likely being in a lot of pain.

"I haven't been drinking that much."

"You were completely taken in by the mermaids' enticements."

"I thought I'd be careful not to get completely drunk and have fun and take advantage of the feast they had prepared. But that sword of yours came at me like he was trying to kill me. It completely killed the happy buzz I had."

Despite the light banter, Francis knit his brows looking serious. Apparently, the trident had snapped when it pierced Edgar, and only a short stub protruded from his side. Francis was apparently carefully weighing whether it was possible to push the head through to the other side.

Edgar tried to take his jacket off, but the slightest movement made him gasp in pain. He looked at Lydia as she moved to help him.

"Lydia, how long do I have before I turn to stone from the magic?"

"Don't worry, Edgar. There's no change yet. You're inside a strong ward against magic, so the magic of the mermaid's trident should also be weakened because of it. You don't need to rush."

Edgar nodded, but gestured to Francis to hurry and get things over with.

"This'll help ease the pain."

Francis took something out from his tobacco pouch, but Edgar pushed it away.

"I don't need opium. I have to keep my wits about me."

Even though they'd escaped their immediate danger, he didn't have time to rest. If he were to lose his ability to think because he was in a daze, they could end up sinking to the bottom of the sea with the city.

"You're really....." Francis closed his mouth before finishing his sentence. He rolled up his sleeves as though he'd gathered the courage to see things through.

Lydia's legs shook as she felt Francis nervousness.

"Lydia, could you wait in another room?"

"But....."

"I don't want you to see me looking undignified." He smiled at her. "Don't worry. I can bear physical pain. Because it disappears once it's gone."

Since Edgar said that, Lydia felt she had no choice but to leave the room. But most likely, a part of her was relieved. She didn't think she could watch calmly as the pushed the trident's head through to the other side and pulled it out.

Most like the building was the home of a wealthy merchant. It was very open in the back and there was a very sunny courtyard there. Lydia sat down on the bench next to the flower bed and fought back the urge to cry. Edgar was the one in pain, so she shouldn't be the one crying. Edgar's always the one to suffer.

Before she realised it, Lydia held her hands together as though in prayer. The

prince had killed his parents, and even though he probably despised the prince's existence more than anyone else, he'd had no choice but to take on the prince's memories because of his bloodline. Even though the Blue Knight Earl's position was supposed to afford him some protection, if it's true that someone came from Ibrazel on a mission for the earl, Lydia couldn't help wondering if Edgar would be able to continue being the head of the house. It was possible that the people of Ibrazel wouldn't acknowledge him as the earl since he was the prince's successor. Even though he was trying to carry out his duty as the Blue Knight Earl and as a member of the nobility, it was possible they would see him as the enemy because he was of the the same bloodline as the prince.

Aeris had been that way. She had some ties to Ibrazel's Diana, and yet she was trying to kill Edgar. It wasn't Edgar's fault. So why did he have to take the blame for everything. Lydia couldn't bear how helpless she felt. Even as a fairy doctor, she'd been of no use to him. Even though she was trying to find out what she could about Ibrazel, it might only end up putting him in a difficult position. And on top of that, she'd ended up getting caught in Aeris's trap, and by coming to Bretagne, she'd ended up putting him in danger. Even though it was their honeymoon, Lydia had been thinking only of the fae. She'd thought that by doing so, she could become the sort of wife Edgar wanted, but most likely he'd been feeling more and more unsatisfied.

Hearing footsteps behind her, Lydia looked up. She quickly relaxed her hands after realising she'd be clenching them so tightly that her nails were biting into them. Francis put his hand on her shoulder.

"We're done."

Lydia felt relief pour over her at the sight of his smile. She quickly got to her

feet.

"Um, is it be okay to go be with him yet?"

"It should be okay. Ah, he said something about not wanting you to see him looking undignified, didn't he? But it was surprisingly how collected he was. If it were me, I probably would've been screaming."

Lydia couldn't help feeling it a bit painful that Edgar was so stoic. She bowed slightly and moved to leave to be with Edgar.

"He has a lot of old scars, doesn't he? They're not that obvious, but you can't help wondering how he must've lived to get those," Francis said. More than to inquire, it seemed like he said it more to tell Lydia about them. Lydia ran off.

'I can bear physical pain. Because it disappears once it's gone.'

For him, pain was simply so commonplace. And Edgar knew something even more painful than that. Something that didn't disappear even when it was over. Something that was constantly tormenting him.

What about mental pain?

Being told that he should never have been born was too much. Edgar realised it was his fault that his parents had been killed and he'd been hurt by that. Even so, he survived for Raven's and his other comrades's sakes, and he's finally reached the point where he finally had some hope for the future. Lydia intended to help him keep that hope, but she couldn't help wondering if he'd been truly able to enjoy himself with her even though they were on their

honeymoon. Even though he'd tried his best for them to have fun spending time together.

Lydia ran into the room and found Edgar sitting on the bench struggling to put his shirt on. He looked at her and smiled as though nothing had happened.

"Lydia, I'm sorry to have worried you so."

Most likely his body was still tense from the ordeal. He was having a hard time getting the buttons done up.

"Wait just a moment and I'll get my clothes on so you can hug me. That's right, the mermaid's trident turned into water as soon as it came out....."

When Lydia drew closer, she saw that there was blood on his wrists and they were chafed. A rope made from a torn sheet lay on the floor. She realised that he'd been tied up to keep him from moving while having the trident removed. And he'd had to bear so much pain that he'd ended up rubbing his wrists raw.

"Does it still... hurt?"

"It doesn't hurt anymore."

It was as though, to him, even something like that was of no consequence once it was over. Lydia sat down next to him, and while normally she would have looked away in embarrassment, this time she reached out and touched his bare skin.

"Lydia?"

She stared at the fading scars on his chest, shoulders and arms tracing them with her fingers. The still angry looking scar on his chest was from the injury he sustained before their marriage, when he tried to protect Lydia.

"I didn't know....."

Because she'd never tried to look at him. She'd always been so embarrassed she never thought to look at him, and she still didn't know what he was wanting.

"I can take it all off if you prefer."

Lydia looked up in surprised and blushed. How shameless she must be to suddenly peel back a man's shirt and then stare at his body.

"Wh-what are you talking about?! I didn't mean..." She moved her hands away and averted her gaze only to realise that she shouldn't do that. She turned and looked at him challengingly. "So..... I want to know! Because I thought that there's still a lot I don't know about you, but you don't need to take them off!"

"You should say that sort of thing seductively rather than like you're trying to pick a fight."

He pulled her to him giving her no choice but to lay her head against his bare chest.

Even as she felt flustered unsure what to do, Lydia felt pain almost like sadness. Not knowing about the hurts of someone you care about very much ends up causing so much pain for oneself. And because she thought that they would be able to share any pain made this all the more difficult. She realised that Edgar may have felt the same way when he discovered the bruises on Lydia's body.

"I'm sorry....."

"Um, I was joking."

"I intervened in something and fell and ended up with those unsightly bruises. I'm sorry for hiding that from you."

"It's not about them being unsightly."

"Your present, too. I'm really happy with it, yet I couldn't just be happy about it. I'm sorry. I'm such a boring girl that you can't enjoy yourself....."

"What are you talking about?"

"But I don't know. What am I supposed to do? What is it about me that's wanting? But it's new to me. All of it....."

"Yeah, you're right."

She wanted to do what he wanted without feeling so embarrassed. But even being held by him like this was enough to make her go completely tense.

"You're not wanting in any way."

"That's a lie. I didn't know about your scars."

"The scars I bear all happened when I was fighting with my comrades. They don't hurt or bother me in the least."

He stroked Lydia's hair as though to allay her fears.

"In fact, for me, they're signs of my freedom. That I was able to do as I wanted, and in exchange for going through situations so dangerous that I ended up being injured, I gained things one by one and managed to drag myself out of the worst of slums. When I was with the prince, it was out of the question for me to become injured. But that was only natural. I was to be the vessel for the prince's soul, so it wouldn't do for me to be damaged or sullied in any way. They treated me very carefully, as though I was extremely valuable china, and they only tried to kill the spirit that makes me who I am."

Wanting to touch his soul, Lydia raised her hand and lay it against his chest. She was very aware of his broad chest which was so different from hers. He was trying to protect her with this body, and he loved her with the heart that lay hidden deep inside.

"That's why your heart's always been hurting."

She looked up. Edgar knit his brow looking tormented as he gazed at her. "Lydia, you're not lacking in any way. I'm wanting something of you that I've never wanted of anyone. And because you try to reach out to me like that..... I

can't hold back."

He tangled his long fingers in her hair and kissed her deeply entwining his tongue with hers.

"Lydia."

Lydia fell back on the bench and she felt the weight she'd only recently come to know bearing down on her. It's possible that there was nothing shameful or inappropriate between them. And realising that made everything seem very dear to her.

"Lydia....."

He repeated her name over and over. And perhaps he too was trying to reach out and touch Lydia's heart. He held her so tightly she could barely breathe.

Edgar's mental pain was unimaginably great and deep, and Lydia felt that she finally managed to touch the pain revealed before her. If he was wanting to bury that hurt, she had no choice but to experience that pain and thirst with him. Lydia believed that would give some comfort. She buried her fingers in his blond hair.

"Edgar." She desperately called his name between kisses. "Whatever happens, I love..... you." Her words came out as little more than a sigh, so she didn't know if he heard them or not.

His demanding kisses and his hands that groped at her body slowly changed into a tender embrace. He lay still with his ear pressed to the swell of her

bosom.

".....Sorry. Did I frighten you?"

"No, I'm okay," she said, but no doubt he could hear her heart racing and her ragged breathing. But she hadn't been frightened so much as she felt a strange sense of excitement.

"Thank you..... Lydia," he said as he lay still. "I wasn't sure how far you'd be able to accept me being this way. I could feel that you love me a lot, but I keep wanting so much as to bury this pain..... And I thought that my being like this would only end up frightening you."

"Don't hold back anymore..... I'm very grateful to God. Because you were born, and because we met one another."

He slowly sat up before helping Lydia sit up. He looked at her longingly.

"It's funny. All this time, I've tried to forget my pain, and yet I can't help wanting you to touch it. Most likely, this pain is proof that I'm alive."

He slowly bent down and kissed her. It was his usual kiss; a kiss so gentle it made Lydia's heart ache.

(My lord,) Arrow's voice said. (The princess of Armorica comes.)

Chapter 6: The City's Princess's Wish

"Edgar! We've got trouble!" Following Arrow's interruption, Francis came rushing into the room. But his trouble was unrelated to Arrow's announcement. "The gold key's gone! I must've dropped it somewhere."

"What was that? Where did you lose it?"

"I don't now. It might've happened when I got swallowed by that wave back in the castle on the island....."

Edgar put his hand to his chin and seemed to be lost in thought, but he soon looked up again and got to his feet. "If that's the case, then there's no helping things. We'll have to come up with another plan."

He picked up his shirt and quickly finished getting dressed.

"What's this gold key you're talking about?" Lydia asked as she stood.

"It's something that Francis stole from Diana in the past."

"What a terrible way to put things. I decided it was best left in my care, that's all. But Edgar, without that....." Francis paced nervously in front of the door.

"Lydia, according to the legend, if the princess is given what she wishes, even men can safely return from here, right? So, we thought that may the princess

was wanting the key to the royal city's floodgate. And we thought that Diana may have searched for that key and gone to the royal city in order to negotiate with the princess.

"So Francis had that key, and just in case you were hoping to bargain with it to return safely?"

Edgar nodded. But Francis said he'd lost it somewhere.

"But I wonder if that's what the princess really wishes for."

"I'm sure it is. Even more than her own life, the princess cared about this city above the sea. Francis argued.

"The princess, who carried fae blood, created this royal city for her father the king on the border between the human and fae realms. At the time, the Vikings were the greatest threat in nearby waters. And they were unable to invade because the city was protected by magic; it was the perfect capital city. And for that reason, no one could defy her, and men were made to wait on her as she wished. That's how the legend goes."

"And the princess cared about the royal city more than her many lovers and more than her father the king?"

"That's what I think. She didn't trust anyone. She seduced any man who caught her fancy, and since it's said she had them banished when she grew tired of them, I figure that's how it was."

Since the princess carried fae blood, most likely she had a free and

uninhibited soul. While the fae are faithful to the promises they make, they don't accept having things pushed upon them. Since she could use fae magic and she defied the teachings of the sages, most likely she was beyond people's comprehension. And that's why, despite having a number of men serve her, she didn't have a lover who truly understood her. And the devil took advantage of that weakness in the princess's heart. Most likely, the devil tempted the man she'd been opening her heart to.

".....The royal city was the only thing that was supposed to protect her. Yet because her lover betrayed her, and the city's keystone—the key to the floodgate—was stolen..."

...Could it be that even now, the princess wanted the key to the floodgate which could only serve to remind her of how prosperous the city once was? If so, it was too sad. Even if the city that used to be above the sea were to exist now in the waters off Bretagne, it wouldn't bring the former royal kingdom back.

"In any case, we'll talk about that later. We have to get out of here. Francis, Aeris is apparently headed this way."

Francis became even more agitated upon hearing that.

"She found out where we are? Weren't we supposed to be safe from discovery here as long as the ward was up?"

(It's effective against the fae. But the princess is only half-fae, and she has human senses as well. Most likely she noticed the smoke from the fireplace.)

"That was careless. I thought there were no other people here but us," Edgar said as he pulled Lydia by the hand.

"She's been alive for over a thousand years, so for her to still feel things like a human....." Lydia murmured as they hurried towards the door. For all that one of her parents had been one of the fae, if she'd given up dying like a human when she sank into the sea with the city, she was no longer human. Yet despite that, could it be that she did what she could throughout the years to remember her human side? Come to think of it, Aeris had human-like compassion. She was like that towards women. Perhaps she hadn't become disgusted with the human realm after being betrayed and abandoned by men.

She remembered the portrait of Aeris wearing the red moonstone ring. The ring that had been her fiance's. What could the princess of the city's sad heart be wanting? For this ghost-town of a royal city to once again appear above the seas? To get the gold key that was needed to make that possible? As long as they could give her what she wanted, they should all be able to get out alive, so Lydia desperately tried to think things through, but she had no leads.

"We can't get out this way. We'll leave from the back door," Edgar said turning back after checking how things looked outside the front door.

Apparently, the mermaids had closed in on them. Going through the inner courtyard, the three hurried as they headed towards the tower that was even further in back. They went from what appeared to be the kitchen with the earthen hearth out to the back lane.

(Head southward. The road connected to the small island is to the south, after all."

"Edgar, I have a favour to ask of you," Francis said suddenly turning formal while walking. "Make me a family retainer."

"Huh? Do you want to play knight or something?"

"I'm serious. I'll swear fealty to the Earl of Ibrazel."

"I don't see much point in doing that now. There's no guarantee Aeris will go easy on you simply because you've gained ties to the earl's house," Edgar said sounding a bit baffled, but Francis wouldn't back down.

"It's a emotional issue. So I've decided that I will share your fate. You might not have known Diana, but you're the lord of Ibrazel."

"Aeris wants to kill me. She lured Lydia to the island in order to do that. She doesn't think I'm fit to call myself the Earl of Ibrazel. You heard what she said earlier, didn't you?"

Francis should have realised that Edgar wasn't a legitimate member of the earl's family.

"It could be that Diana thinks the same way."

But Francis had no second thoughts despite that.

"This is my own problem and has nothing to do with what Aeris or Diana thinks. I couldn't have come hear on my own. Even if I'd been able to find Aeris's old castle, most likely I would've hesitated because of the legend that all

men are eliminated. Not to mention Diana rejected me, so I have no right to love her." Francis smiled at Lydia who watched them looking worried. "I don't have that right, but seeing the two of you, I felt that I wanted to get closer to Diana. I didn't try to get to know Diana, yet wanted to make her mine. So Edgar, I'll trust the name you go by. I want to face Aeris as a retainer to the Earl of Ibrazel. That's the only way I can learn more about Diana, right? After all, plain Francis would have no right to ask about Diana, who'd been working for the earl's household, and her whereabouts."

Edgar stopped suddenly. He quietly turned and faced Francis and called Arrow. It was almost strange how naturally Francis knelt before Edgar. Lydia vaguely realised that he too, was the descendant of a knight from long ago.

"The merrow's great sword..... Diana'd told me about that star sapphire, too."

Edgar raised the sword before him. Francis closed his eyes as though in prayer as he felt the tip of the sword touch his shoulders. There were no words or anything else, and most likely it was that alone that created something holy that bound the two. Lydia watched them and it was only when Francis, still on his knees, took her hand and kissed it that she realised what he'd done.

"Let's go."

Perhaps that too was part of the ceremony. Edgar said little as he started walking quickly again.

However, not long after they left the back lane, they found mermaids standing before them. Their scantily clad seductive figures blocked their way. Even though they were in human form, the voluptuous mermaids had a

presence no human woman had.

"There's no point in running."

Mermaids carried a litter up from between the ranks. Aeris sat in the beautifully decorated chair meant for a lady of noble birth. She wore an ancient Roman style tunic and a blue cloak the colour of the sea hung on her shoulders. A pearl tiara sat on her black hair. Unlike the Aeris of the grey dress that tried not to stand out, the person before her bore the elegance and dignity of the princess of the ancient royal city. But either way, there was no question that the person before them was Aeris.

"I won't allow men to leave here alive."

She got down from the litter and stood before Lydia and the others. Edgar held his sword keeping Aeris in check.

"The merrow's sword..... That you actually managed to claim it is quite the feat. However, even if you strike me down, you will not be able to leave here."

"I can make sure that you can't harm Lydia."

Aeris chuckled. "Kindly make no mistake. I'm on Lydia's side. Now Lydia, come over here. I'll see to it that you can return safely."

Lydia shook her head and took a step back. "I'm staying with Edgar."

"Do you intend to die with him? Is that alright by you, Earl?"

"She's going back with me," Edgar said firmly.

"That's not possible. Because there are rules to this place."

"The rule that men can't return if they cannot give you your wish?"

"My wish..... A wish that is meaningless now. So Lydia, think carefully. Your abilities as a fairy doctor should be used for the sake of the world. And you, earl, you should realise that if you really love her, you should do as I say." Since they were surrounded by mermaids, they had no choice but to listen to what Aeris had to say. She looked at Edgar coolly. "If you're saying that it's against your will that you're called the "Prince of Calamity", don't you think you should accept dying for Lydia's sake? As the Lady of Ibrazel, Lydia can take on that sword. Since the social position is nothing more than something determined by humans, in the Fae realm, Lydia can become the master of Ibrazel. No doubt, she would do what she can, for humans and fae both, to ensure that the magic of the Unseelie Court is never used for evil again. It just means that the position Earl of Ibrazel no longer exists in England."

Edgar looked tormented as his breath caught.

'You're wrong,' Lydia thought. 'I'm not so great a fairy doctor. While I want to become a proper fairy doctor, I've never once thought that I want to become the master of the fae.'

I just wanted to become like my mother—trusted by the fae and content with being so greatly loved by my father—she was always smiling so happily, so I wanted to become like her.'

Lydia's wish for the fae and humans to be able to understand one another and for both to find happiness was most likely because those around her were so happy, and it was tied to the joy that spilled over from there. And since she saw things that way, she disagreed with Aeris's ideal.

"You see, Earl Ashenbert, everything would turn out well. I wonder, if there's a role you can carry out as the Blue Knight Earl, if that mightn't be it. You're the Blue Knight Earl who is supposed to eliminate the prince and protect the futures of the fae and England, right?"

"Edgar, no!" Lydia yelled afraid that he might nod. If he agreed with Aeris's words, he would end up forming a contract with the fae.

"We can't be separated. Isn't that right?"

He looked down at Lydia narrowing his eyes slightly. ".....Yes, you're absolutely right."

"In that case, you'll both die here then? Lydia, I brought you here because I didn't want to lose you. But I have to protect the city, so I have no choice."

"No, Aeris." Lydia firmed her resolve and faced the princess of the royal capital. "I'll give you your wish and then return safely with everyone."

Aeris frowned at her as though in pity. "Are you saying you understand my

feelings?"

"I don't, but I'm just an ordinary fairy doctor. Until recently, I didn't know that I came from a family that had a history of controlling fae magic. I'm a fairy doctor that's helped regular people take care of minor issues. What I have isn't the ability of the MacKeel clan, but my mother's wisdom and honour. That's all. If you, as one of the fae, are saying that there are laws that must be upheld here in this city, it's my job to find a solution!"

Aeris sighed and said something in what seemed to be Breton, and the mermaids tightened their circle around them. Their hair rippled. Was another wave coming? Just when she sensed that was the case, she heard the sound of hooves pounding on the cobblestones approaching.

A grand carriage being drawn by four horses rushed towards them trying to scatter the mermaids. A shot rang out from inside the carriage causing the mermaid's ring to break.

"Found you! Where'd you hide my wife?!"

A heavy large man brandished a pistol. On top of that, he held a girl with braids as a hostage.

"Kelly!" Lydia cried. She spotted Raven and Nico in the driver's seat.

"That man's... Slope? What's he doing here....." Edgar murmured looking surprised.

Just what was going on?

"Your wife is dead. You killed her yourself," Aeris said.

Slope glared at her with his bloodshot eyes. "You..... I see. So you're in cahoots with the Ashenberts."

He kept his finger on the trigger and alternated between pointing the gun at Lydia and Aeris.

"Hurry up and bring me my wife. If you don't....."

Just then, Raven suddenly set the carriage running making Slope, who was still holding Kelly, to fall back into the carriage. Lydia was caught completely off guard when Edgar grabbed hold of her and leapt into the carriage. The carriage went through the mermaid's ring and continued running off. Lydia clung to Edgar desperately as they were jostled about in the carriage. He shifted holding Lydia protectively. Slope was still right before them with pistol in hand. However, he too, had his hands full struggling to hang on to Kelly as the carriage bounced wildly sending them rolling about.

"Raven, where's Francis?"

"I pulled him up over here," Raven said from the driver's seat.

Glancing that way, he could see Francis hanging on desperately trying not to be thrown from his seat, while Nico clung to Raven's waist.

The carriage went faster as it continued racing off. They ran down stone steps

and turned sharply in a large square throwing off their pursuers. They exited out onto a road with high walls, and most likely were headed for the corridor that led to the small island.

"Lydia, are you not wearing a corset?" Edgar murmured suddenly in Lydia's ear. His question did not suit the tension of the situation they were in.

"Wh-what a thing to ask!"

"It's been bothering me all this time, but it feels so good to hold you that I'm not quite sure what to do."

Having him say things that way, Lydia became flustered. She suddenly remembered the feel of his hands and the feel of his chest, cheek and hair as they lay on her body without the constrictive corset on while they were taking refuge in of the houses.

"Being able to hold you someplace other than in the bedroom when you're so soft and defenseless is new.

"H-help Kelly!"

She wanted to say, 'Now's not the time for that, right?!' But that was Edgar—joking around at times like this.

"Of course." Edgar smiled suggestively as his arms wrapped around her waist held her firmly against him.

As soon as he did, the carriage suddenly came to a stop. Lydia realised that he held her so firmly to protect her from the impact of the sudden stop, but he kept her body firmly against his even after the carriage came to a full stop.

".....I can't breathe."

"Wait just a little longer." Edgar said.

Slope started to raise his pistol right before Edgar. He was at point blank range. But Edgar was calm almost cold when he said, "Raven, it's about time you freed Kelly."

The door burst open and Slope suddenly found himself being held down by a slender young man who wrenched the pistol from his grasp. Raven wrapped his arm around the big man's neck and dragged him out of the carriage. It took little time before Slope went limp unconscious. Raven let go of the man and turned to look at Edgar.

"I beg your pardon, my lord. This man took Kelly hostage and ordered me to take him with us, and since we didn't have much time, I decided to do so for the time being."

Lydia helped Kelly who'd most likely been left as a hostage and gone through a frightful ordeal because of Raven's deciding something 'for the time being'.

She stared at Lydia with tears in her eyes. "Mrs. Lydia, I'm so glad you're alright."

"I'm sorry to have worried you, too."

"I see. It seems we have little time," Edgar murmured as he looked in the direction Raven pointed.

The carriage was stopped just before a long corridor. The long corridor with high walls on either side was connected to the island with the old castle that was in the human realm. However, a thin layer of water was running down the cobblestone road.

Lydia looked towards the sky. The sun had sunken quite some distance. It looked like it would soon reach the horizon.

"Uwaaa, why?! The sun was still high in the sky until just a moment ago!" Francis stared at the sky holding his head.

"Most likely she used magic hoping we'll get careless....."

Men weren't allowed to return alive. The law of the royal city was most likely also Aeris's firm wish.

(When the sun reaches the horizon, water will come flooding in through the floodgate. Most likely, this place will be completely under water by the time the sun sets,) Arrow said. (In any case, I'll make it such that the mermaid's can't come near here. Please get across before the princess gets here. If the city sinks, her magic will no longer reach the small island either. And most likely, the mermaids won't be able to control the waves.)

"Yes, let's hurry. Since we no longer have the key, we can no longer try to bargain with Aeris. Francis, you'll have to wait for another opportunity to learn

about Diana."

Francis nodded disappointed.

"If water's going to start flooding in soon, we might not be able to use the carriage part-way through. We'll go on horseback. Francis, are you good at riding?"

"I can manage..... But it'll be the first time I ride without a saddle."

Raven didn't wait for instructions and started to unhitch the carriage's lead.

"Kelly, you and Nico are to ride with Raven."

Kelly paled when she heard those words. "Um, but, I....."

Most likely a number of things had happened before they finally managed to reach the city. Kelly's distrust of Raven had become even stronger than what Lydia had last seen.

"Do you want to ride with Francis? But Raven's an excellent rider even without a saddle."

".....If both Mr. Nico and I were about to fall, you would choose Mr. Nico, wouldn't you?"

"Yes." Even though there was no need for him to answer, Raven immediately

replied to her question seriously.

Kelly turned even paler.

"I-it'll be okay, Kelly. If you're with Raven, there's no chance you'll fall in the first place."

Even though she didn't seem convinced, Kelly finally nodded in resignation.

"Hey..... by key..... Do you mean a really old looking gold key?" Nico suddenly asked as he lay on his back on the driver's seat of the carriage.

"Nico, you know about it?"

"I saw it in the castle. It was on the floor of the hall on the fourth floor, but when I went to pick it up, that guy stole it. He even stepped on my tail!" Nico jumped to his feet angry as he remembered what happened and pointed at *that guy*. It was Slope who'd been beaten up by Raven.

Edgar walked to where Slope lay. Apparently he'd already regained consciousness, and he slowly looked up. Perhaps he'd heard Nico's words. He looked defiant. "You want that key? Lord Ashenbert, if you want to know where it's hidden....."

Edgar kicked him before he could finish his sentence. Slope doubled over coughing hard.

"Wh-what did you do that for....."

"I have no intention of making deals with you," Edgar snarled coldly as he ground his foot on the man's head. "You're obviously lying when you said you hid it. You're better off handing it over right now."

"I-I got it..... I'll give it to you....."

Edgar started to move his foot, but he kicked Slope again when he put his hand in his pocket.

"Edgar! Don't be so violent....." Lydia shouted and tried to run to Edgar's side, but Francis stopped her.

"He was about to pull out a knife."

Lydia gasped when she saw the knife laying on the ground next to Slope as he lay doubled over again. If he'd shown any mercy, Edgar could have ended up being stabbed.

"Lydia, he's the man who caused your injuries. I can't forgive him," Edgar said.

As Edgar picked up the knife, Slope looked terrified and scuttled backwards away from him. Reaching the stairs, Slope struggled to get to his feet.

"You're quite vicious, aren't you, earl? And you think you're a normal human being despite that? It's because you're that way that I thought you'd caused

Lydia's injuries."

Aeris suddenly appeared at the top of the stairs and slowly started down the stairs. Like water, her blue cloak flowed down the stairs after her.

"I am normal. I can differentiate the vermin. You seeing all men as the enemy are the one who's not normal."

Edgar turned his attention to Aeris and Slope took advantage of that, quickly getting to his feet and running to Aeris as though seeking her help.

"I have the gold key. You want it, too, don't you? If you help me, you can have it."

Aeris raised a white arm. The princess had once been called a witch. Slope stopped shocked when he caught sight of her surprisingly fierce countenance. The gold key came out from the inside of his jacket and floated in midair.

"You want me to help you? This was mine from the very start."

"I brought it. Aeris, Diana had found it and was trying to bring it to you. If that's what your wish is, then I'd like you consider my request." Francis hurriedly stated.

"Too bad, what's to be given in exchange for this has already been determined in my promise with Diana. Not to mention this isn't my greatest wish."

".....So Diana had come here in order to give this to you in exchange for something?"

"That's right. But since you'd stolen the key, she'd come here without the item she was to give in exchange, she ended up leaving having gained nothing. Cruel man, she risked her life trying to carry out her duty only to have you ruin everything."

'Risked her life. Could it be that Diana's no longer alive?' Lydia felt that as she listened to them.

Perhaps Francis had thought that since she was missing, perhaps she'd ended up dying somewhere. He said nothing as he hung his head. But apparently, he was still unwilling to give up. "Diana forgave me..... So if possible, I'd like to carry out her last wish. Aeris, would you give me what you'd promised to give Diana in exchange for that key?" he finally grated out.

Diana was from Ibrazel, and since Edgar was its lord, perhaps that was part of the reason why Francis had sworn fealty to him. Aeris however, wouldn't agree.

"Men can't return from here alive, so what's the point in giving it to you?"

Things were starting to get side-tracked. Mermaids appeared at the top of the stairs. Edgar quietly pulled Lydia's arm. He had the reins to one of the horses in hand.

"Arrow, now!"

The instant Edgar called, a silvery flash covered the area.

"Raven, Francis, let's go!"

Unable to see well, Lydia felt herself being pulled up on a horse before setting off for the corridor surrounded by the walls. Edgar held Lydia firmly with one arm, but since they didn't have a saddle, she felt very unsteady. She wrapped her arms around him and clung to him. Raven, with Nico and Kelly, and Francis followed after them.

Silvery light flooded the area behind them. Arrow's magic was managing to keep the flood wave that the mermaids created in check. But despite that, the water covering the ground in the corridor was slowly getting deeper.

The horses ran on kicking up so much spray that it felt like rain. Looking up, the sky was becoming increasingly red. From where they were between the tall walls, it was virtually impossible to tell where exactly the sun was, but there was no question that it was very close to reaching the horizon. The city would soon sink into the sea. Perhaps the sun was this very same colour on that final day so very long ago. The sky, the sea, and the granite coast line too, were all dyed the same colour.

No, this sea and coast were originally tinted red because of the magic stone. It's the colour of the moonstone that sank into the sea together with the princess. Aeris said she'd let go of her betrothed's hand. And she believed that with that, he could abandon her without being troubled by a guilty conscience.

Because it was a prearranged betrothal.

But even if he'd done it simply out of the kindness of his heart, perhaps the man who'd tried to save the princess right until the very last moment made

some lasting impression in her heart. Like this sea and the rocks and buildings bordering the sea in this area, faintly and red.

"Lydia, is the water cold? You only have to endure it for a short while," Edgar said trying to cheer her up. Most likely because Lydia had unconsciously pressed her cheek to his chest.

She wanted to feel his warmth. Their escape wasn't the same as the princess and her betrothed from that time. She prayed that they wouldn't end up being parted like the tragic legend. In the end, Lydia still didn't know what Aeris's wish was, and Edgar was trying to force his way out. But Lydia couldn't help feeling overwhelmed by uncertainty whether it was possible. For all that the city was close to the human realm when it showed itself above the sea once a year, it was still part of the fae realm, so its laws couldn't be changed. Edgar, too, should be aware of that. That's why she was afraid. That maybe a part of him felt that as long as she survived that's all that mattered. Or whether he would continue like they were for as long as necessary, not give up, and fight to stay with her. But they were out of time. And they had no other choice. They could only continue to push forward.

(My lord, there are too many of them,) Arrow's voice said.

Apparently, he was at his limits for holding their magic in check.

Edgar urged the horse to run even faster, but the water in the corridor was slowing the horse down.

"Edgar, the wave.....!"

Looking back, a huge wave broke through Arrow's silvery light and headed straight for them.

"Earl, move away from Lydia," Aeris's voice said. "If you drag her down with you, you're no different from that man. The man who killed his wife."

What happened to that Slope? Did the mermaids capture him and were they trying to drown him together with the city?

"You knew that the prince had driven your parents to their deaths and that he'd devised your family's downfall, yet you still took possession of the prince in his entirety. You were born to want power and to control people; it's part of your very nature. Just how evil that desire is..."

Edgar said nothing as he grit his teeth tormented.

"No doubt, one day, you'll end up crushing Lydia underfoot as well."

It's not like that. Edgar had stolen everything there is to the prince in order to protect Lydia. Even if he ended up suffering, he's always tried to bring happiness to those around him. And even though he was that way, being with Lydia gave him a little peace. So if in seeking peace of mind he wanted her, she wanted to respond to him in her entirety.

"Edgar, you're a very kind person. If you weren't, you wouldn't be as hurt as you are..... You're not evil."

I believe that you will never change and that you will always cherish me.

She heard the wave as it drew closer.

She clung to him firmly and pressed her head to him, but he didn't hold her as firmly as he always did.

"Lydia..... I want to protect you, so what should I do....."

"No, don't let go! Edgar.....!" Lydia screamed as she watched the crest of the wave rise over top of them.

Edgar's breath caught for an instant as the wave struck them. They were going to fall. When he realised that, Edgar let go of the reigns and grabbed hold of Lydia. He held them against wall to keep them from being dragged back by the wave then quickly got to his feet in the short instant the water stopped flowing. Even though they'd fallen from the horse, they were uninjured thanks to the water that had continued flooding into the corridor. Unfortunately, the horse ended up running off without them.

There was no sign of Raven and the others. Raven no doubt would manage somehow on his own. And most likely, he would be able to protect Nico and Kelly. As for Francis, he could only pray that he was okay.

"Lydia, can you stand? The island's only a short distance away."

"Yes....."

He could see the island. But they hadn't managed to get even half-way

through the corridor. Most likely Lydia realised it as well, but she struggled to her feet and lifted her wet skirt as she continued forward. The water was already up to their knees. So even though they tried to run, they couldn't move very fast.

His doing this was only pushing Lydia closer to the brink of death. No doubt the law of the city would see Edgar dragged into the sea. He knew that, yet he was still trying to take Lydia away. For the sake of his own wicked passion? Lydia said not. But Edgar didn't know if he was doing the right thing or not.

However, Lydia held his hand firmly. So he was unable to let go of her hand and continued hurrying on ahead. He felt the flow of water around his legs change and realised that another wave was about to come rolling over them.

"Aeris, stop.....! This has nothing to do with Lydia!"

"Then move away from her," her cold voice said clearly above the sound of the waves.

He may no longer have any other choice.

"Edgar, you're not alone any more. Your past is a part of me now."

He couldn't let go. It was thanks to his meeting this young lady that he'd been saved. And it was for that very reason that he didn't want her to meet the same fate as him.

"Aeris, you don't know anything, do you? Even though you had many lovers, you never knew true love, did you? But you want to know, right?" Lydia

desperately continued speaking. "We'll show you.....! Regardless what happens, Edgar will never let go of my hand. We don't mind if we end up dying together. After all, except for living our lives together, we realised that we have no future."

Her fervent words echoed almost painfully in his heart.

Yes, he must not let go of her hand. Because it would mean betraying her love. The two had come so far that they could no longer consider breaking their relationship for the sake of one of them. Despite his having taken on the prince's memories, he was here now having determined to continue going through life together with her.

".....That's right, Aeris. You don't know, do you? Just how much I love Lydia....."

If there comes a time when he lets go of this hand, it would be for one reason alone. It would be when the prince took control of him. He was supposed to have already decided that.

"I'll protect Lydia. Even from what is inside me!"

He held her hand firmly and pulled Lydia to him. They could no longer avoid the incoming wave. Stopping, he met Lydia's gaze as she smiled as though prepared for whatever might happen, and held her. Feeling bliss the instant her slender arms wrap themselves around his back, Edgar closed his eyes.

Chapter 7: For the New Legend

The royal city that controlled the kingdom of the sea was surrounded by high walls and was a fortress on the sea. The one who built that wonderful city was a lone princess whose mother was one of the fae.

She's a witch.

Almost every day, someone whispered that. She must be using strange magics since it wasn't possible to see the city surrounded by its rock walls from the sea.

This city is controlled by a witch.

In the palace, there were even those who said that the beautiful fairy, who'd been their now deceased queen, had been a witch and deceived the king. Peace was maintained thanks to fae magics, and the kingdom prospered. But the negative comments about the princess were unending as people said such things like even though she was a woman, she was involved in politics, or that she paid no heed to her father the king.

Lydia watched the story of the ancient royal city as it was revealed before her, and she wondered idly if she was dreaming. The streets were teeming with people, and they all looked busy as they went about their work. At the sound of the church bell ringing, a flock of pigeons suddenly took to the air from the belfry. But that scene wavered as though it were happening in the water.

Lydia had a bird's eye view of women gossiping around the well and confidential talks at the palace. And if she tried listening in, she could hear what they were saying. If this was a dream, it was possible she was seeing Aeris's dream of the distant past. When she thought that, she found herself in the middle of a room done in marble. And beyond several layers of curtains, Lydia caught sight of a woman who was propped up on one elbow as she lay on a Roman-style divan. She had wavy black hair and almost shaped eyes. It was the voluptuous princess.

"No one tries to understand how I feel. They just want this kingdom." The softly spoke words spilled from her lips.

"No, I can understand your lonely heart."

A strikingly handsome young man was kneeling next to her. Lydia sensed that he was the princess's last lover—the one who betrayed her.

"You're a clever person, you have the power to rule this kingdom, but the sages and ministers all try to push you aside simply because you're a woman. I understand."

Lydia watched as that man is then enticed by another person. She somehow understood that the other person was the underling of an invader who was after that beautiful kingdom. God and the devil were images created in the legend. The princess was simply someone who was unlike other people because she carried fae blood, and she wasn't a wicked woman.

Even so, the invader was contemptuous of her reputation, and had her lover steal the gold key from her while she was sleeping. In order to sink the city into the sea. With the floodgates open, water rushed into the streets, and people

ran about trying to flee.

It hurt the princess to see that as she watched from the palace crying tears of dismay. She should never have trusted anyone.

"You're still here? Princess, you must hurry and evacuate. I'll take you out of here." The person who said that was a man wearing a red moonstone ring.

The princess followed his urgings and left the palace, but water had already started flooding into the evacuation route. He tried to get the princess to mount a horse, but the horse would be slowed with two people on it. No doubt they wouldn't make it in time.

"Please go. This is my city. I will share its fate."

Because it was the one thing that never betrayed her and the place that gave her peace.

"No, take this. This is partially in the fae realm. If you use its magic power, no doubt..."

He handed her the red moonstone that he wore on his finger. It's definitive sheen had the same appearance as the moon she could see in the sky shortly before sunset.

"But that is the magic power that protects you. There's nothing between us. It's magic will not save me."

"You're my fiancée. I came here to ask for your hand in marriage."

"It's something that others decided upon."

"Even so, since I accepted the proposal, I will love you."

"No, while it may be your honour, it's not love. So you see? If I let go of your hand, you too....."

The princess fell from the horse, and she sank into the depths of the sea. Together with the city and her betrothed's red moonstone.

The sea and the sky, the rocks along the coast and even the buildings became dyed with its colour. Together with the princess's grief, and the faint expectation she felt towards the person who tried to save until the very end, the colours dissolved and blended together, and that colour was the only thing that knew what the princess's wish was.

"The sea remembers everything. And it never forgets. For all time."

Lydia sensed someone whisper that from right next to her.

"Aeris."

Just as Lydia was unable to see her own figure, she was unable to make out

Aeris's. Inside the sea's memory, only her awareness became like water and drifted there. That's how it felt.

"I neither wanted to drag my betrothed with me into sharing my fate, nor did I want to end up being bound because I was indebted to him for saving me. So I have no regrets." Her soft voice was unlike the dauntless Aeris, but was like a woman who was unsure about love. "It might be that I just wanted to know. How things might have turned out had I not let go of his hand. Is love something that can save a person, even if it means sacrificing yourself or your partner? Or is it something that drags them down to sharing the same fate? I thought either way, it was either deceit or self-gratification."

Even though she couldn't see her, Lydia sensed Aeris smile slightly.

"But the two of you were neither of those. Not to give up. That was the choice the two of you made. And it was your answer to my wish to know if a true bond existed between a man and a woman."

The image of the cityscape wavered. As though being erased by ripples on the water's surface.

"Go, Lydia. With the earl and with the members of the earl's household. You've managed to find the only way out of this city alive."

Lydia sensed the presence was about to leave and hurriedly called out to stop her. "Wait, Aeris. Please, tell me. Where is the red moonstone now? How can we go to Ibrazel? Where is Diana?"

"Impatient, aren't you? But you're the Lady of Ibrazel. You have the right to

know." Her voice remained in that place. "I returned the red moonstone to Diana. Because it belongs to Ibrazel. Diana was supposed to head to England across the straight after leaving here. But the only thing I've heard from one of the denizens of the sea is that she died."

"She..... died?"

"Most likely before achieving her goal....."

"By the prince's organisation?"

"No. Apparently, she was ill."

Could she have been given that duty even though she was unwell?

"Lydia, if you're committed to marrying that earl, find the red moonstone. It's Ibrazel's greatest weapon."

"It's a weapon?"

Surprised, Lydia considered what she knew about the white moonstone. It was the moon, a bow, and it had protective powers. And on the other side, perhaps the red moonstone had the ability to attack the enemy.

"It belongs to the Ashenbert family of Ibrazel and is a weapon only men can use. That time when it left its bearer's hand, the stone coloured this coastline through its own magic. As though leaving a sign to tell its owner that it's here."

"So, even now, that sign might still be somewhere?"

"As long as it's not in the hands of the one who's meant to be its bearer, most likely the red moonstone will use its own magic in order to show where it's located. But Lydia, the earl's Arrow hasn't grown enough to be able to use the red bow. And it's questionable whether a family leader who doesn't carry the blood of the Blue Knight Earl will be able to gain much power from it."

"Even so, there's something to be gained by finding it, isn't there?"

"Most likely, it has the strength to protect your husband's soul from the prince."

If they had it, it might mean that Edgar wouldn't end up under the control of the prince's memories.

Lydia listened intently determined not to miss a single word Aeris said.

"Lydia, I'll pass map Diana carried on to you. It was sent to me as a memento, but the map to Ibrazel might be on it."

"Might be?"

"It's blank. But I've heard that it's a map. You're trying to make him the real Blue Knight Earl. And he too is trying to becoming the real thing. If that's the case, then you're the ones who should have this reminder of Diana. I pray that the door to Ibrazel opens for you."

Aeris moved to leave. Lydia vaguely realised that she couldn't stay there long.

"Now, you should go."

"Will I be able to see you again?"

The princess who had both a fae and human soul. And because of that, she'd been shunned and become the main character to a sad legend. Lydia felt that she understood Aeris's feelings a little, and that's why she'd been able to realise what her wish was. Aeris had met the lord of a fae kingdom in the distant past before his family gained the title of the Blue Knight Earl, and Lydia felt she was like a very distant relative.

Aeris chuckled. "That's a foolish question. I'll be here for eternity. But a human soul shouldn't leave its body for very long. Not to mention she's beside herself with worry."

She?

Lydia's vision wavered almost as though she were in the sea, and she caught sight of a dark shadow. She focussed on it and realised it was a kneeling woman. A woman dressed in men's clothing. No, a selkie. Lydia knew her well—it was Ermine who'd become a selkie.

"Ah, that's right. I have something for the earl in return for bringing me the key. Troops from my city to fight the prince. But be careful when you call for them because they might end up trying to kill the earl."

Aeris's troops. Most likely, they would be those mermaids. All the talk of

weapons and troops was very imposing. But that's what Diana was needing for Ibrazel. So she hoped it would be something Edgar needed and that they would protect him.

"I will guide you, my lady," Ermine said.

Lydia looked at her; she was neither surprised nor did she find it strange. She and Ermine were involved in the same future. So she'd always thought that they would meet again one day.

"I thought I saw you at the hotel. It wasn't my imagination, was it?"

Ermine stood keeping her eyes averted. She then turned and started walking.

"You were with Aeris? So, you weren't with Ulysses.I see. Ulysses and his people can't try to do very much here. Ermine, in truth, even now you're trying to do what you can for Edgar, aren't you?"

Ermine remained silent. After a long pause, she finally spoke as though she couldn't hold back any longer. "Mrs. Lydia, please don't trust me. I might end up taking something very important away from you.No, in order to keep that from happening, you should do everything in your power to gain Ibrazel in its entirety....." As though waking from a dream, Ermine's figure vanished from Lydia's sight, and Lydia felt her physical senses returning. But there was one thing she knew. That Ermine was fighting for the sake of what was important to her.

"See, Mrs. Lydia, it suits you well."

Lydia slowly opened her eyes. She was standing in front of the mirror in an evening dress. She saw herself in a dress that was much more adult in design than what she normally wore. While she wasn't used to wearing such, she was relieved to find that it didn't look as bad as she thought it would. It was the first time for her to wear a rose red dress.

While it was a style that hid the bruises on her shoulders and arms, it was quite revealing both in the back and at the bust. While the bruises on her back hadn't fully healed yet, by gathering her hair together, curling it and letting it fall down her back, it artfully covered the bruises for her. At an evening gathering with lamps and chandeliers for lighting and with the moving shadows from her hair, it was unlikely anyone would notice the bruises.

Fighting back the desire to be less stylish, she was glad that she didn't have to wear a high-necked dress. The hairstyle Kelly came up with gave the impression of a newly married naive young girl while maintaining the grace of a married woman, and it suited Lydia perfectly right now. And more than anything, the white butterfly-shell beaded handbag that Edgar had bought for her went wonderfully with the solid red dress.

"You're right, it's wonderful, Kelly. While I can't do this dress or your skill justice, for me I look good." While the dress and purse wouldn't change dramatically, she thought she looked much more like a countess.

"Mrs. Lydia, you don't give yourself enough credit," Kelly said looking upset as she put her hand on her hip.

"Lydia, have you finished getting ready?" Edgar's voice asked.

Kelly opened the door for him, and he entered Lydia's dressing room. While it was about time she got used to seeing him in a white tie and tailcoat, she still found him too striking and couldn't help looking away.

"Are you sure about going to the party? You don't have to force yourself; it's okay to refuse. After all, you were unconscious for a full day."

That's right. When Lydia woke after being guided back from Aeris's city by Ermine, she found herself in one of the guest rooms at the hotel. Edgar and the others had all safely been swept away to the island with the old castle. Naturally, Lydia had been, too, but she alone remained unconscious. While the old woman at the castle had stated that there was no need to worry, Kelly told Lydia that Edgar had stayed with Lydia the entire day and never left her side. Lydia felt that she finally understood a little what it was that he wanted from her.

Lydia had been afraid of giving him her inexperienced and awkward love, but that was what he fervently desired. She wanted to see him for who he was and get to know him even more. She wanted to become able to envelop his past and his hurts. She'd thought that her role was as the earl's fairy doctor. And while that was important, there was something else more obvious and important. And reconsidering how to be Edgar's wife from hereon, Lydia was putting in her best effort in getting ready and facing the party.

"I'm okay. There's nothing wrong with me." She raised her face and looked directly at Edgar. With his bright blond hair, she'd never imagined that the man she would marry would be so strikingly handsome. He gazed at her gently with his ash-mauve eyes, and that alone was enough to make her cheeks flush. He came closer and looked at her from up close.

"You'd agreed to tonight's party some time ago, right?"

One of his English aristocrat acquaintances was staying at their country house here on the pink granite coast. When Edgar had told them that he was planning on staying at a nearby hotel, they mentioned they were holding a party and invited him.

"Well, that's true," he replied absent-mindedly. He stared at Lydia so intently making her nervous.

I guess I still can't wear this kind of dress quite yet. Among the evening dresses she'd had made as part of her trousseau, she thought this one was the most beautiful but also the most difficult to wear. She wanted to wear it when she became a more fully-grown lady. Lydia didn't know what Kelly was thinking when she included it in the luggage for their trip, but since it was there, Lydia wanted to try it on. While Kelly had complimented her, perhaps it looked strange in Edgar's eyes.

"Um, Edgar, if you don't like this, I can change into a different dress....."

Lydia started to back away, but Edgar suddenly wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her to him making her fall against him. She felt his fingers as they ran along her nape, and he pressed his lips to her shoulder. Putting one hand to the back of her neck so that Lydia couldn't move, his lips traced a line from her throat to the hollow of her collar bone. Lydia shivered when she felt him lick her, and she quickly tried to move away.

"Edgar..... wait....."

"Master, kindly don't muss her hair now that it's been nicely done up. Also, what are you going to do if you end up leaving a mark on your wife's skin?!"

Edgar took his lips off of Lydia at the sound of Kelly's voice, and Lydia turned more and more red when she realised Kelly had seen them. Unlike Edgar, Lydia didn't think she could get used to the idea of acting as though the servants weren't present.

"Would it be okay if it's somewhere not obvious?" Edgar asked looking at Lydia with a straight face.

"Eh?"

"Leaving a kiss mark." Edgar said as he ran a finger along the bust line of her dress that was slightly more revealing than usual.

"O-of course not! What a thing to ask!"

Lydia hurriedly pulled away from him. But he pulled her to him again.

"Oh dear, I no longer want to go out."

"Master, what are you talking about?! The missus has worked so hard to get ready, yet you intend to put all that effort to waste?!" Kelly protested.

"Eh? You mean she didn't get dressed up for my sake?"

"Of course, she did. It's to show everyone how fortunate you are to have such a beautiful wife."

Though Edgar seemed, even now, like he was about to ruin all their work at getting Lydia dressed up in that dress, Kelly managed to ward him off completely.

'Kelly's really something,' Lydia thought as she heard Edgar sigh disappointed. She straightened his pocket handkerchief. And doing so gave her the feeling that they really were a married couple. The little every day things hinted at the future happiness that spending the years together would bring.

As Lydia smiled, she had no idea how warm and gentle her love was as she nestled against him, and she was unaware how she seemed to glow.

Edgar seemed to collect himself as he gazed at Lydia. "We're together every day, yet you become more and more beautiful with each day. I can only hope that it's the result of all my love for you."

"You're kidding. I haven't changed that much."

"You mean you haven't noticed? Maybe I don't love you anywhere near enough for you to be content."

"I-it's more than enough." She ended up blushing again and trying to move away, but Edgar chuckled amused.

"Would it be alright for me to intrude? It sounds like you're having fun."
Francis said as he appeared.

He looked sheepish as he waved from where he stood beside the door Kelly had opened. Edgar had Lydia take his arm and led her to the drawing room where Francis waited.

"I hear you're going to a party? But before that, I wanted to express my thanks to Lydia."

"I didn't do anything....."

She'd told Edgar everything she'd learned from Aeris. And Edgar was supposed to have told Francis about Diana's whereabouts. It hurt that she didn't have good news for him.

"No, I'm glad to know for sure. And it's thanks to you that I'm alive. Aeris most likely wouldn't acknowledge me, but since you're the Lady of Ibrazel, she probably thought that she should tell you about Diana's death. Not to mention that it seems I managed to come back here alive because I have ties to the earl's family."

Lydia walked over to Francis and took his hand. "I think Diana believed that you would go to that city with the gold key one day. Most likely she'd told Aeris that, and that's why she so readily gave me what had been promised to be given in exchange for it."

Francis looked away probably seeing the image of Diana in his mind. "You're

probably right. Back then, I saw her mission as an obstacle to our love. But most likely I was being tested to see if I loved her enough so as to protect all of her including her mission and her goals. I wonder if we could have become like the two of you had I realised it sooner..... Like the two of you who were able to demonstrate to Aeris the precious bond that she wanted to know about." Francis gazed at Lydia again and smiled. He still held her hand and seemed unwilling to let go, and Lydia thought that it was most likely because he was deeply struck by that thought, but...

"Where do you think you're looking?"

Edgar suddenly hid Lydia behind him as he stepped between them.

Much to her surprise, Francis smiled teasingly. "Naturally, at what's most attractive."

"Do you want to lose your other eye?"

Francis laughed as he dodge Edgar's finger and headed for the door. "Lydia, I pray that blood doesn't end up being shed at tonight's party," he said as he left.

"Master, you should probably be leaving soon," Kelly prompted.

"We'll do that." He took Lydia's arm and sighed. "It's such a waste to let other men see you. After all, you're mine now," he murmured. He gazed at her bosom.

Lydia finally understood what was meant by the previous conversation and her face went red as she frowned. "Wh-what are you looking at?!"

"Eh? You mean I'm not allowed to look as much as I like?"

"D-don't ogle like that.Also, I don't think Francis was actually thinking any dirty thoughts when he looked..... More likely, that part just happened to enter his field of view."

"As if that could be the case! Lydia, if I'm thinking it, then it's only natural for any other man to be think the same thing. They just don't actually say it."

Lydia thought that that especially was unlike to be true.

"If that's true, then does that mean you look at other women that way, too?"

"Certainly not. I have a beloved wife, so they don't interest me."

That's definitely a lie.

"In that case, then other men aren't likely to be interested in me."

"You're wrong about that. Not all married couples get along well. There aren't that many men out there that are as smitten with their wives as I am with you. So... that's right. Try not to bend forward too much tonight."

He was in decidedly good form joking around so readily.

Lydia couldn't help feeling a bit exasperated. "You're right. I'll be especially

careful in front of you."

"Ehh, that's no fair."

The two laughed as they went down the stairs towards the foyer.

While she wasn't used to being in society and attending parties, as long as she was with Edgar, she wasn't afraid of them. She also enjoyed spending time chatting together. And she wanted to continue protecting their happiness.

"Lydia, we will find the red moonstone," Edgar said turning serious for a moment.

Lydia nodded firmly and looked at her white moonstone wedding ring.

"Edgar, you know how this white moonstone was the magic white bow? What they say is the weapon, is the red bow then."

When the star sapphire's arrow is used with the white bow, it was able to purge the Unseelie Court's magic. It was a very powerful ward against evil magic.

"That's right. It could be that the red bow uses the sword's other magic and makes an arrow of the star ruby."

When the sapphire turns into a ruby, the sword displays destructive powers. In which case, the bow that fires that arrow would have that same destructive power. And unlike the sword which was only good one on one, it was possible

that it had the power to affect a large area. Aeris had said that Edgar would be unable to use it right now. Lydia didn't know if there was anyone who could use it or not. Even so, if it was possible that the red moonstone might be able to protect Edgar from the prince, they had to find it.

Their only clue was Diana's map. Lydia had been found unconscious with a silver locket in her hand. Inside the locket was a piece of ivory with nothing on it. While it didn't make for much of a clue at the moment, if they could figure out how to use it, most likely they would be able to figure out where Ibrazel was.

"Ermine also said something about gaining Ibrazel in its entirety."

And there were still many things they didn't know about the prince's organisation and the Blue Knight Earl. And it was possible that the MacKeal clan's prophet might be involved in some way.

"I'm not sure what her intentions are, but I'm glad she's fine and that she's free and not being held captive."

As always, it was impossible to tell from her attitude if she was their enemy or their ally, but since she showed herself to Lydia, that distinction was most likely already clear in her mind.

"I wonder why she doesn't show herself to you."

"I don't think she will. I think she's realised that she's no longer doing things for me but for herself."

He was probably right. But at the same time, Ermine still left her pelt in Edgar's hands. In other worse, her life was still in his hands. Perhaps it was her way of showing her loyalty. Because most likely, her soul eternally belonged to Edgar.

A carriage was waiting for them as they went outside. Normally, Raven would be somewhere nearby, but Lydia noticed he was nowhere to be seen.

"By the way, I haven't seen Raven for awhile."

"Ah, I had him look for galettes that fly in the sky," Edgar replied calmly.

Lydia frowned in surprise. "Do galettes fly?"

"You said you wanted to see it, didn't you? Flying galettes. Nico said so. If it's something you want, then I want to give it to you."

".....About that, I thought it strange when the fae were talking about galettes that flew through the air, but when I asked the hotel staff about it, they said they were a food. Honestly, that Nico..... I was just nodding along to the strange things the fae were saying!"

"Really? So Nico was mistaken then. I was thinking flying galettes seemed odd, too," Edgar laughed lightly. But since Edgar had ordered it, Raven was undoubtedly desperately searching for galettes that flew through the air.

"Wait, you should call Raven back."

"I don't know where he is."

"But....."

"There's nothing to worry about. I'm sure we'll be able to see flying galettes soon."

It's not like I really want to see that.....

Lydia seemed a bit taken aback, but Edgar was unconcerned as he helped her into the carriage. And the carriage quickly sped off on the rose-coloured cobblestones that the red moonstone was supposed to have coloured so very long ago.

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The sound of the clock in the hall echoed throughout the hotel. Kelly sat in one corner of the drawing room waiting for her lord and lady's return. While she ended up accompanying the couple on their honeymoon shortly after she started working for the earl's household, many unbelievable things had already occurred. Kelly believed that the fae existed. But she never expected she would actually experience going to the fae realm herself.

"Mrs. Lydia is a true fairy doctor....." She'd been able to return from the royal city of another world after all.

Even in the Connaught clan where the job of fairy doctor had become obsolete, people still spoke about what sort of people fairy doctors were. They were people who brought happiness to both the fae and people. And Lydia was

trying to do just that. She'd heard that there were those among fairy doctors who used fae magic in order to control the fae. But even at the royal city, Lydia abided by its law, realised what the princess's wish was, and managed to get everyone out safely. They say that a true fairy doctor gains the fae's trust and is then able to acquire their help. So there was no doubt that Lydia was just that.

"Hmm? Raven's not around, huh?"

And here too, was a fairy that Lydia was friends with. The grey cat had spoken as he entered from the window. His long tail waved elegantly as he stood on two legs and looked up at Kelly.

"Yes, he went to find galettes that fly through the air at the request of the master."

Nico looked surprised as he scratched his head with his small hand close to where his ears poked up from his luxurious coat.

"Oh dear. About that..... When I double checked with the corrigan about it, they said galettes are something you eat. And even though they're the ones who said they fly, they just asked 'did we say that?' They'd already forgotten all about it."

".....Really? I wonder how far Mr. Raven went. He doesn't understand French or Breton."

"Yeah, well, with Raven, I get the feeling he might actually find flying galettes."

"I found them."

The two turned to find Raven standing in the doorway.

"Ehh, really? But galettes don't really fly, right?"

"Five days from now, there's a festival in a nearby village where people compete and see how can throw a galette the farthest."

"That's a strange festival."

"It's probably a harvest offering. The throw them from the top of a cliff towards the ocean, so the galettes that are cooked paper-thin look as though they're dancing as they fly through the air."

"That sounds rather fun. Good job, Raven."

Even though he'd been complimented, Raven's expression didn't change, but somehow, he seemed very happy as he looked at Nico.

"By the way, Mr. Nico, there was something I was wanting to ask you." Raven spoke in the much friendlier manner that he used only when speaking with Nico.

"Sure, ask me anything," the gentleman in the form of a small cat said acting like a big brother.

"That time..... I thought I saw selkies. So I was thinking that you probably saw the fae even more clearly than I did."

That time, the time when they were fleeing from the royal city, they'd been swept up in a wave and thought they were done for. But something had pushed Kelly and the others to the surface. And while another wave came, this time, it washed them ashore on the island.

Kelly also thought she saw a swarm of something blackish. Perhaps those were the legendary selkies. Could selkies have been in mermaid territory? Lydia had given Aeris what she wanted, so the mermaids changed the movement of the wave. They stopped trying to drag everyone into the sea, and they swept everyone back to the human realm. But Kelly too, sensed that after they'd been swept from the horse and seemed like they were about to drown, the mermaids magic wasn't what helped them out first.

"Yeah, they were selkies." For some reason, Nico spoke quietly as he looked up at Raven gently. "This area isn't part of the selkies's sea. They might have been her friends."

"Perhaps they were somewhere nearby."

"Maybe."

Kelly didn't understand what they were talking about, but they seemed to be sharing a fond memory, so she remained silent trying not to interrupt them.

Raven seemed to pulled himself together, and he looked at the clock.

"Most likely Master Edgar will be late returning tonight. Do you wish to retire first, Mr. Nico?"

"I think they should be returning shortly."

When Kelly spoke up, Raven looked at her as though he only then realised she was there. Somehow, she wasn't entirely surprised.

"But Master Edgar tends to stay at parties until late."

"They're in the middle of their honeymoon. Naturally, he'll want to leave soon and spend time alone with the missus. And even were that not the case, when he saw how beautiful Mrs. Lydia was tonight, he was acting like a child wanting her all to himself."

"I see. Lydia has her hands full, too." Nico laughed amused.

"You're quite something, Miss Kelly. That's a very mature opinion."

Raven didn't seem to say those words to spite her, but rather, he seemed to have been honestly impressed. Kelly had no choice but to give in.

"Well, in any case, as long as they're getting along well, that's all that matters. Not to mention Lydia's being a lot more amenable, too."

"About that..... you know how the master sometimes likes to trouble or anger Mrs. Lydia, right? So the most worrisome time is when Mrs. Lydia happily cuddles up to him."

".....It's true that the more complacent Mrs. Lydia is, the more Master Edgar tries to get away with things and they often fight as a result." Raven frowned slightly possibly having become worried as well.

Perhaps they were relieved at having been able to return from the royal city safely, but the two of them were getting along much better than usual today. So Kelly couldn't help feeling that something would probably happen soon. Just as she thought that, the door opened noisily and Lydia, in her red dress, came running into the drawing room.

"Kelly! Wh-what should I do....."

"What has happened, my lady?"

"I forgot."

"What did you forget?"

"That she said she would do one thing I asked in apology." Edgar was in a good mood as he followed her in.

"In apology?"

"That's right. For keeping things from me. Even though I would never chastise her for doing something out of kindness. So, from now on, you should trust me and no longer try to hide things from me," he said.

Lydia turned and looked at Edgar. "Naturally, I will do that. But this and that have nothing to do with each other, right?!"

"But they do. In other words, there's no point to stubbornly hiding your body."

"But the bruises haven't fully healed yet....."

"They won't bother me in the least."

"B-but..... Kelly!" Lydia looked at Kelly as though begging for help.

"Umm... master, for now, I'll help Mrs. Lydia get changed."

In any case, if she didn't get Lydia calmed down, the two might end up in another argument. So Kelly tried to intervene, but Edgar quickly pulled Lydia to him and opened the door to their bedroom.

"There's no need for that. She doesn't need her nightwear tonight." He took her into the bedroom and closed the door behind them. Kelly stood there in shock along with Raven when she finally came to her senses. She stared at the bedroom door with bated breath. She stayed there for some time, but there was no signs of Lydia coming running out of there.

".....It seem that our work is done for today."

Kelly looked as though a burden had been lifted from her shoulders as she turned to go finish straightening up the dressing room.

"Hey, do you think they'll be alright? Lydia's quite stubborn, and when the earl takes advantage of her weaknesses, he'll probably try to get away with more and more," Nico said. Raven stood next to Nico with his head cocked slightly to one side looking uncertain.

"Most likely, things will be fine tonight."

At a glance, he seemed overbearing, but in the end, Edgar would lose to Lydia. And if push came to shove and Lydia seemed like she was about to cry, most likely he would be unable to force her and would end up trying to appease her instead. And undoubtedly, Lydia would then end up forgiving him and try her best to give him what he wanted.

"Honestly, talk about putting you on edge. This morning, Lydia was being quite complacent after she'd finally regained consciousness and didn't mind being with him."

"But I feel like this is the way they normally are."

Kelly nodded agreeing with Raven.

"Yes, I think it's better not having to be in the position of having to be keenly aware of a person's love. I think it's much better that even though the two sometimes fight, they still sleep together."

They were carrying a burden that made it difficult for them to be a quiet couple, so it might be difficult for them to be like ordinary couples. And for that reason, Edgar and Lydia both could probably feel that sort of everyday

contentment as they had their minor arguments and made up from them.

Afterword

Hello. This time, we have the honeymoon arc. While they're travelling in France, the area they're travelling in isn't very famous, so it may be that many people won't realise it. I checked through a number of travel guides, but most of them don't list the area(!). But this is a story about 'the fae', and when it comes to France, that's the place to go. After all, that's the area where Celtic style legends of fairies are! While this is a short after word, I really hope you enjoyed this story. And that someday, you'll read about them again.

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